The Paris Review

68

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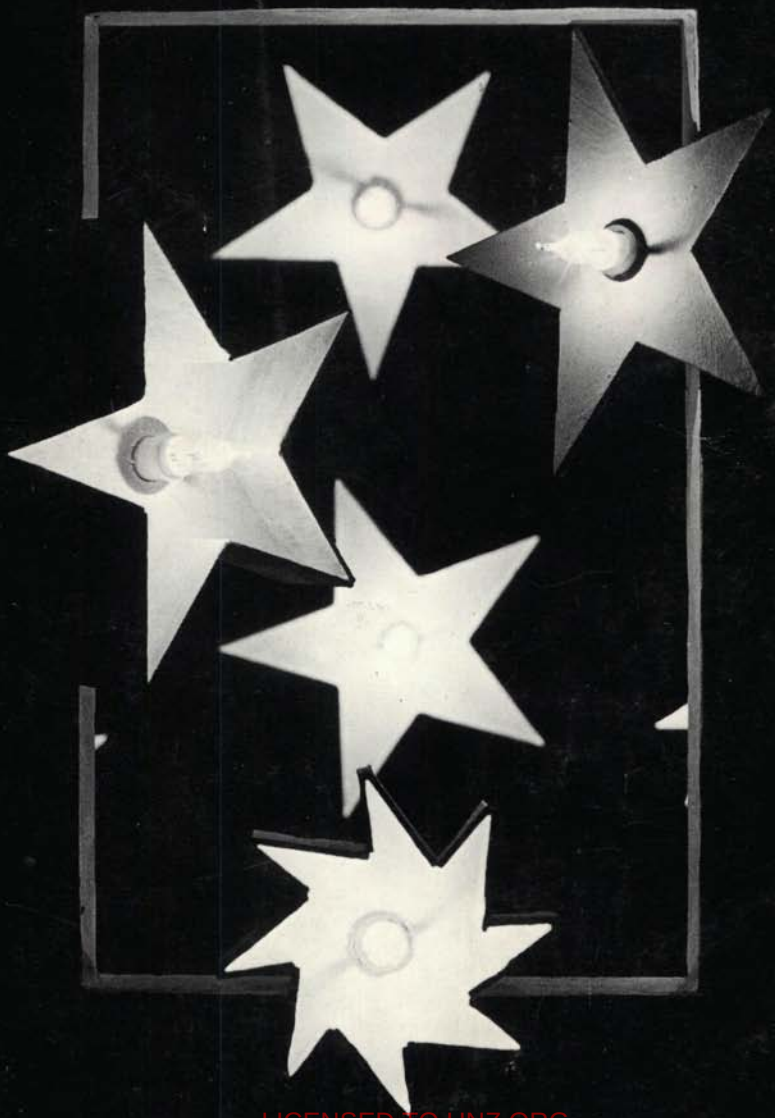

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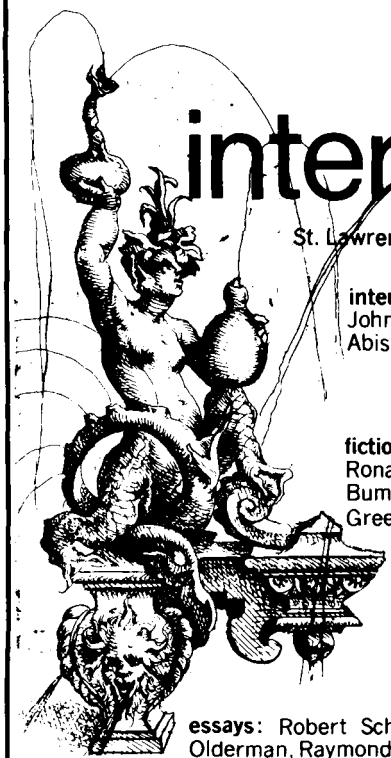

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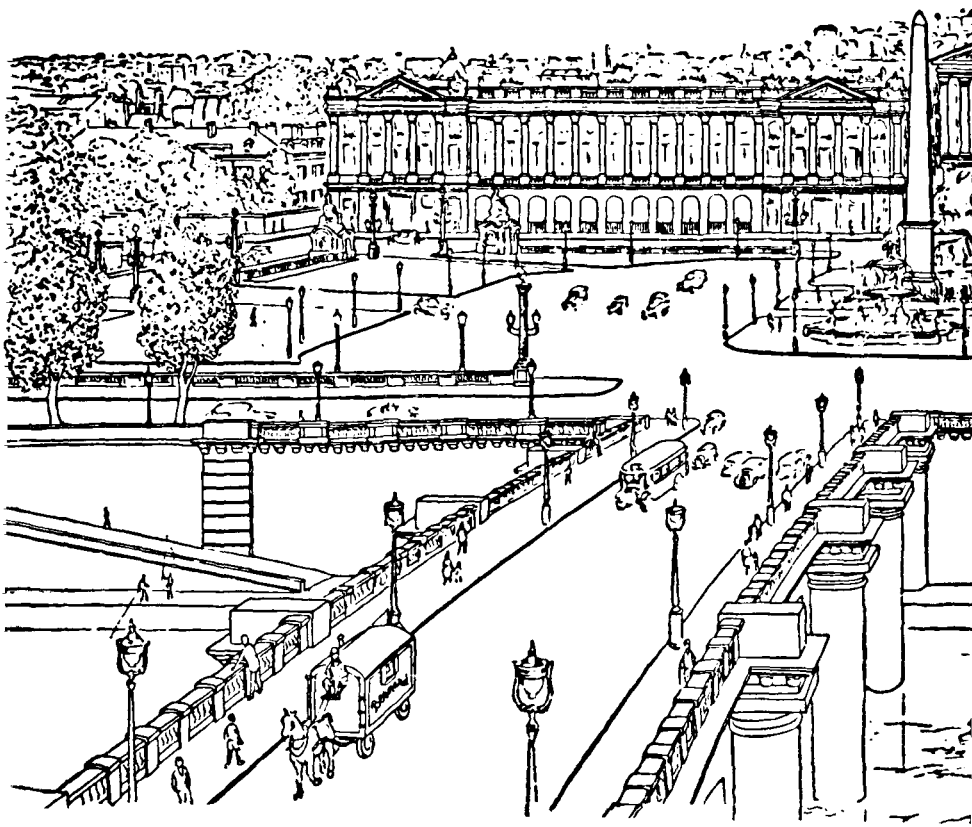

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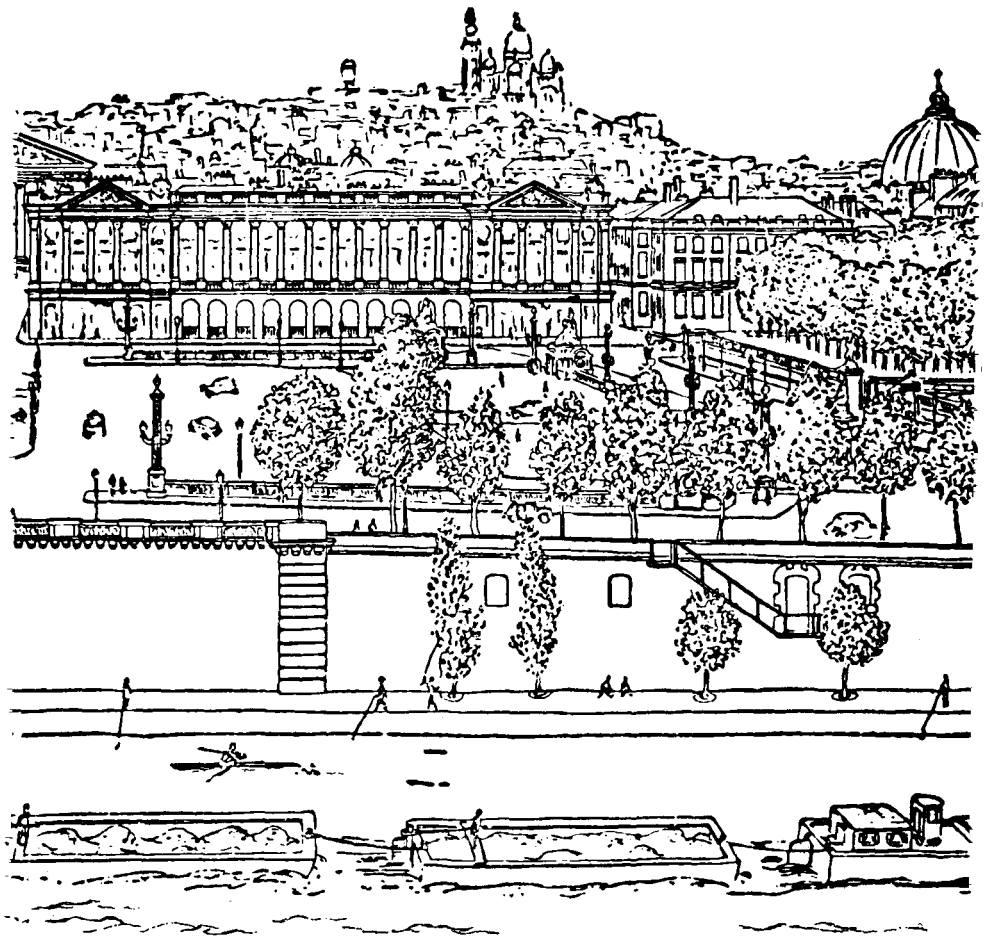

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NOTICE

The masthead, which was discussed in the last issue of this magazine, has been tinkered with once again—a few names added (these offices now know better than to remove a name), and a major change effected in the position of publisher. Sadruddin Aga Khan, who has been publisher of this magazine since 1955, will be listed as Founding Publisher, and the new publisher will be Bernard F. Conners.

A word about Prince Sadruddin. He came to the aid of the magazine in Europe at a difficult time; if it had not been for a financial commitment in 1954 the Review could not have continued. The sum was not all that large by publishing standards, but it was enough not only to keep the magazine alive in Paris but to generate a sense that he was there to help should the need arise. He became publisher in the summer of 1955. The story is that the undersigned asked the Prince for help and offered him the position of publisher while the two were running before the bulls at Pamplona—the rocket having gone off by the pens, and the bulls coming up the hill toward the Plaza Maior, and that Sadri, moving along at a great clip with his mind on what was coming up the cobblestone street behind him, replied, "Oh, for God's Sake, yes!" The truth is not

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far from all that. Since that early, startled commitment he has taken an active interest in the enterprise. In 1955 he persuaded his father, the Aga Khan, to set up an annual prize for a short story contest—a prize which the Prince has offered in the name of his father to this day. It has been a distinguished one—winners having included Philip Roth, Lamar Herrin, Paul West, David Evanier, among others. That first year the Aga Khan entered the contest himself—sending in stories which were elegant, as might be expected, and very much in the vein of his close friend, Somerset Maugham. They were not turned down with any sense of smugness by the editors.

In recent years Sadruddin Aga Khan has devoted his energies to the United Nations where he serves in the post of High Commissioner for Refugees. It is in part because of his wish to dedicate himself increasingly to this most worthy of causes that he feels he cannot commit himself sufficiently to the affairs of this paper. But he cannot let go of us completely. His interest continues, and he will continue to offer the annual Aga Khan Fiction Prize.

His successor, Bernard F. Conners, is a newcomer to publishing. Very much in the way his predecessor saved the magazine in the fifties, he helped effect the move of *The Paris Review* from Europe to New York where it is now published. Subsequently, he gave an extraordinary fund-raising party at his house in Loudonville, near Albany, fireworks and all, at which the guests were expected to subscribe to the magazine, which resulted in the highest incidence of **Paris Reviews** per acre up there than in any other community in the country. Conners hopes to find additional, if slightly more traditional, ways of expanding the magazine's readership and keeping the publication healthy, which constitutes all one can hope of a publisher.

Another small matter regarding mastheads: Israel Shenker of *The New York Times* has pointed out an error in the last issue's Notice: our characterization of Minnie Magazine of *Time* as a code name is incorrect. Minnie Magazine does in fact exist, and has for many years, working at **Times** News Desk. Our apologies for Dehumanizing her to Minnie Magazine, or, might one dare say, Ms. Magazine.

G.A.P.

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The Animal Way To Love

Sena Jeter Naslund

First Toby Redheart quoted to me:

"By the shores of Gitche Gumee,
By the shining big sea water
Stood the wigwam of Nakomis
Daughter of the Moon, Nakomis."

Then he released one drop into the lower flask and the solution turned lavender. It was a titration experiment. At what precise ratio does the pH factor change from acid to base? This last clear drop pierced the surface tension, then was redefined as a lavender drop, sinking down. Like a fetus, it hung suspended in its fluid; the lavender drop, bulbous like the outsized head, the lavender contrail curling after it, a faint umbilical.

"What was that?" I said.

" 'Hiawatha,' Longfellow. I thought it was great stuff when I was the BIA's little boy."

I was thinking of marrying Toby Redheart. I was only thinking of it. Was he thinking of it? After the experiment

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was over, he told me his father was an alcoholic.

The BIA. The BIA. The Bureau of Indian Affairs.

I told him I had been president of the Birmingham chapter of FSA—Future Scientists of America. I felt I was ashamed of it. I wanted to be ashamed of it.

Should I marry him? We walked across the campus together.

This was a late spring night. It seemed cold to us both, the Iowa spring. He was a Hopi. We were both a long way from home. I wore a turquoise poncho, knitted and fringed by myself. I remember how I had to keep my arms folded across my body under it to keep them warm. Toby put his arm across my shoulders. I felt armless because I hadn't made any slits or any good way to get my arms out of the poncho. It just had a hole for my head.

"Trixie," he said, "do you want to travel with me when school's out?"

I stopped like a post.

"What?" I said, "What?" I felt horrible.

"Nothing," he said.

We started walking again.

He was short and had to hustle to keep up with me. I would name you Running Deer, he told me once. He was standing up two steps of the chemistry building. Grad students were streaming by on all sides, our acquaintances. Bright mid-day sun on the concrete steps. On us. He drew a finger wide line down my nose. "I would name you Running Deer, if you were mine."

2: Running away

Toby put me on the bus so early in the morning, June, it was still dark. I would get to New York in the middle of the next night. I forgot to kiss him good-by until I was already on the first step. I had to bend over my suitcare to kiss him and I could feel it bumping against his chest. I hated being so clumsy.

The nearest vacant seat was beside a young fellow with

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short slicked down hair. Obviously uneducated. He was awake and upright. I sat down. He was thin and wouldn't crowd me.

I was going to see the Engels—my married friends from undergraduate days. We all three lost our religion together. Strange, because the professor was a Christian. It had been the only philosophy course at Birmingham State. The Engels got married. My belief was already shredding. I wriggled out of it like an old skin. Painless.

There was a book in the station at Davenport, Iowa. *The Animal Way to Love.* I got it, but he was sitting next to me. How could I read it? It had pictures. I didn't know anything about sex. Toby and Bert Engels were the only people I'd ever dated. It wasn't that Toby was rushing me, but should we get married? I wanted to think about it. I wanted to talk to Jane about it. He hadn't asked, but I'd asked myself: did I want to?

I started to sweat whenever I thought of it, it next to the zipper change pouch in my big purse: *The Animal Way to Love.*

"Ever seen any rodeos?" my seat partner asked. "I'm a bronc buster."

I wanted to know how it was done, but it was such a physical thing to him he couldn't say much about it.

He got out his wallet. It was brown-and-white-spotted with the hair still on the hide; the edges were whipped together with gymp. Out the window the sunlit countryside was slipping by. I thought he was going to show me a snapshot but instead he asked me to feel the wallet. I did.

"Soft, ain't it?" he said.

"Yes."

"You'll never guess what that is. That's unborn calf."

That was the high point of our conversation. He asked me to have coffee with him at the station in Chicago and I refused. I went to the station bathroom.

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3: Reading it

"If you have never examined yourself, you should do so. This is an easy procedure, yet most young women in this country have never examined their own genital area. There is no reason not to touch yourself. With one hand, position a small mirror below the genitals—" Safe in the stall. Safe. This was Chicago. Fast, fast: "—with the other, spread the labia majoris (outer lips)."

It made me want to faint. My heart was flying. It was enough. I could read it later. I closed the book. I snapped my compact closed. The lid clamped the edge of the flat puff. *Love-Pat.* That was the name on the lid. My white plastic compact. The lid was decorated with many concentric circles. In the center of the bulls-eye was the gold label: *Love-Pat.* Love. The outer lips. Labia. I rubbed my crotch once with the palm of my hand. Quickly then I reassembled my clothes.

The soap in the Chicago station was a viscous chartreuse liquid in a flask. The flask sits in a metal ring, bolted to the tiles. You pump the metal stopper up and the liquid flows out. It always seems dirty, doesn't it?

4: The Many on the trip

She was wearing an old-fashioned orange hat that had the brim stiffened by rows of machine stitching. The rows were parallel and about 1/4 inch apart. She was a neat, nice, middle-aged black woman, and she had a large open-mouth satchel on her knee. I could see a Bible peeking out of the top.

We waited to go. The loading docks are underground in Chicago. The ceiling is low. Everything's grey and dingy. There are puddles of oil on the floor and fluorescent tubes on the ceiling. We waited to go.

The driver took up tickets. He was a young man—big; sweat trickled down his cheek though I found the temperature pretty comfortable. I was glad to see he was young; I'm always apprehensive if the driver looks frail. My seat partner slipped her Bible out, read a few verses and slid it back in her

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purse. All of her gestures were unobtrusive, and I congratulated myself on picking her out. She wasn't going to bother me. There were no babies and nobody was coughing.

Once out of the city she asked me in a low voice where I was going. She sat perfectly still while she talked. She'd been to a big Baptist convention in Denver. "O, it was a *wonderful* convention," she said. "This was my eleventh." She lived in Indiana, but was going to New Jersey to see her niece. Very soon in the conversation she told me she had no children and so she got to travel a lot. It was obvious that she felt bad about not having children, but that she tried not to mind. She said she was quite a church worker and that she had been president of the Women's Bible Class.

"They asked me, 'Now you come on and be president again next year,' but I said no. No, that's something I don't believe in. Everybody ought to have a chance. I loves to serve, and other people loves it too. I wouldn't ever be president twice in a row."

It had cost her plenty not to indulge in a second term. She was sincere. When we got to a rest stop, she said she didn't think she'd get off. I offered to bring a coke back on for her and she accepted.

Next we talked about cooking and she told me about her favorite recipe—Texas hash. At this point she asked if I would mind writing my name in her book. She took out a slender green leatherette book and I put my name in it. She gave me a small return-address label with her name and address on it and a tiny circle of a Christmas wreath in the corner: Mrs. Mamie Floyd.

The conversation wound back to the church. She had a new young minister.

"I thought, well, I don't know about *this*. I'm used to an *experienced* preacher. But after that first Sunday sermon he comes over to me and he puts his arm round me and gives a big soft squeeze and says you sure do have a pretty hat, Mrs. Floyd. I always wear a hat. Not so many people do nowdays."

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"I think more's starting to," I said. I really have always liked them. I saved several from past Easters—each one in perfect shape.

"I always wear a hat. Especially on Sunday. Last Sunday the preacher said, 'Where *do* you get all those hats?' 'Well,' I say, 'some I makes, and some people gives me.' "

"Can you make hats?" I said.

"Yes, indeed."

At a certain point I could feel the conversation taking a new direction. Mrs. Floyd wanted to find out something. I thought I knew what it was. She wanted to find out if I were religious. I began to sweat. I didn't want to tell her I was an atheist. We had had such a pleasant rapport. What was the use of ruining it? Still, I hated to lie. Sure enough she finally asked me. I'm sure she could tell I was uneasy.

"Now, do you belong to any church?" she asked.

I took the historical start: "I was brought up in the Methodist church—"

"That's all right. That's *all* right. In Heaven we'll all be one."

I couldn't believe it. That was enough! I was off the hook without a lie. So I told her about how I used to sing in the choir. She told me O they had had a wonderful choir at the convention. Then she leaned over in a confidential manner, which surprised me.

"That man sitting behind us, *he* was at the convention. He's a missionary."

By mutual consent we quit talking and began to eavesdrop on his conversation. I could tell that his seat partner was a chiropractor. The missionary was trying to suggest to the chiropractor that he was in a quack business. It really hit my funny bone. The chiropractor seemed too dense to catch on and the missionary was hindered in revealing the truth. He was supposed to be a nice guy.

Finally the missionary said in a pseudo-speculative voice, "Do you imagine—I was just wondering—could it be—I mean I wonder if, just if—could some of those cures happen

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because these people really just had their disease in their head?''

''Yes,'' the chiropractor responded with enthusiastic authority. ''That's called psychosomatic!''

''Lemme tell you what I did,'' he continued. ''There was this little girl, twelve years old. Her daddy took her to every specialist in the state. Her right arm was paralyzed. It was rigid. Got that? I took this little girl and put her on that table. I popped her back and then I rubbed her arm. All of a sudden she says 'I can move it! The feeling's back!' That man was so happy, he wanted to pay me five hundred dollars. Course that's way too much. But that arm like to drove him crazy.''

The missionary said, ''Well that was wonderful that you could help her.'' He was trying to find a sincere pitch for his voice. He couldn't.

''Listen,'' the doctor went on. ''There was a sixteen year old boy. He'd been blind for five years. He couldn't see the sun, he couldn't see when you shone a flashlight right in his eye. . . . '' Of course the chiropractor had cured him by touching him. Miracles. He was like Jesus. Did the missonary recognize it? He grew quieter and quieter.

In the front of the bus an adolescent boy whirled around. He knelt in his seat and folded his arms across its back. His face was sharp and acne-marked. A young black girl sat just behind him, just in front of me. He looked down at her and said vehemently, ''Do you know the Lord?'' Oh, no, I thought. Is he going to harangue that poor girl?

She responded, ''Yes, Jeeeeesus,'' very softly—''do you know Him?''

They were in perfect accord. They asked questions. Each insisted on his own phraseology. They sifted for discord: the fall of Adam and Eve, the nature of Jesus, the essentials of salvation, the fate of the damned, the function of the Holy Spirit, the ritual of baptism, the end of the world.

It was one of the most lively and most impersonal exchanges I've ever been party to. I was surprised to find myself bored.

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Everybody on the bus was entirely tolerant. Finally we stopped for lunch. I had some lousy chili.

During the afternoon I tried to think about the personal question I had in mind, but I couldn't get organized on the subject. Was I supposed to marry? It seemed to belong to a different time and place. I guess that's one of the benefits of travel. One of the clouds was shaped like the map of England. Maybe I dozed some, too.

We had supper during twilight. One plank of sunset glowed at the bottom of the gray sky. Outside the restaurant window was the gray highway with a constant zip of cars in both directions. I thought of the cars and their headlights as resembling cold bees. It seemed rather desolate. I consoled myself by thinking of my good friends who would wait up for me. Bert didn't own a car so I would take a cab to the Lower East Side apartment.

When we were lining up to get on the bus I was a few feet behind a shapely blond woman in a red sweater and blue skirt. Her hair was so blond it was white. It had deep waves and was turned under in a page-boy.

After dark on the bus an incident happened in connection with her. She was sitting next to some sort of foreigner. He had very black hair; his bone structure was a little too heavy for an India Indian. He was probably Persian. About eight o'clock the driver pulled the bus off the highway and stood up. He was a middle-aged man. He spoke sternly to the blond woman: "Now that's his seat and that's yours. He's paid for it, and you stay out of it. I'll put you off this bus if you don't leave him alone."

At the midnight break I saw the front of her. She was old. Her skin was yellow and very wrinkled. Yes, you could see the skull, if that's what you want. Her eyes were ringed with black shadows. She was wearing long white boots of crinkly vinyl. A parchment face. I was sure she was a prostitute.

Poor guy.

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5: Two o'clock in the morning

Mrs. Floyd was sound asleep, but I woke up: it was two o'clock in the morning when we stopped next time. Someplace in some countryside. No station. A small group huddled up to the bus. No chance they could get on: we were full. But to my surprise almost a dozen people pulled down their boxes and suitcases and disembarked. It seemed like no place at all. What could bring so many people here? Then the newcomers started moving on. They were all middle-aged adults, guided by older adults. They had long slender canes in their hands—a mixture of men and women. They were blind. The one at the top of the aisle balked. Somebody on the stairs was crying. Several of them were crying.

"I don't want to sit with any of them."

"Why can't we sit with each other?"

"I'm scared."

They snivelled and whined and whimpered: both sexes. The older people were trying to encourage their charges to go ahead.

"Somebody'll be there to take you off." A gray-haired man to his pudgy son.

So, the blind people were going by themselves. Some of the riders who had been left with single seats began to double up to accommodate the blind. The fellow across the aisle from me went to the back. Two blind people, a man and a woman, were guided into his seat. There was a lot of blubbering. I was amazed. The college-age blind at Iowa navigated the streets with only their canes. They walked rapidly and took pride in their independence. Once in a while, one was run over.

"Now, phone up when you get there," a woman said.

"Bye, Mama," he said pitifully.

But already their fingers were beginning to explore. They touched the arm rests and pressed the buttons to make the seats recline. They reached down and struggled with the foot bars. They touched the backs of the seats in front of them. The man across the aisle used his cane to plumb the step-

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down to the center aisle. The lights went off. The bus door closed with the muffled pressure that suggests a seal. From outside the voices of the parents of the blind called faint good-byes. None of the blind answered. The bus pulled off into the night.

"Have you got an ashtray under the arm?" the woman asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"They say there's a bathroom," she answered. They were both feeling again what they had already touched. He touched her knee.

"O, excuse me."

"That's all right."

They didn't seem to be well acquainted. I heard somebody get up further back. It must have been a blind person. The footsteps were shuffled. The bathroom door rattled. Before long, the bathroom door clattered again.

The woman said, "I believe I'll go to the bathroom."

The man banged his cane around on the floor; he swung his knees out and let her pass. She grabbed the backs of chairs to guide her. When she came groping back, she grabbed the top of my head to steady herself. If she recognized it as a head she gave no sign. The bus kept plunging forward.

"Herbert," she said, looking straight ahead. "Is that you?"

"Right here," he answered and stood up. They held on to each other in the aisle and slowly rotated so she could get back in.

"That's the cutest little room."

"I'm going," he answered.

He pushed the strap of his cane up his forearm. He held onto people's heads as though they were knobs. Nobody complained. Finally I heard the door swing. When he started coming back, she thumped her cane steadily on the floor.

"Did you hear me?" she asked while he lunged into the seat. "I was giving a signal."

"I knew that was you." He reached over as though to put

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his hand on her knee but it landed in her crotch. He slowly felt his way to her knee. I decided not to watch.

We were out in the country and it was quite dark. But those small lights that are built into the sides of the aisle-trough are always on. I saw him put his arm around her. Next I was aware that he'd turned his back to me and drawn his knees up. I glanced down the aisle. Three other blind couples had started to neck. Most of the other passengers had fallen asleep again. I was glad Mrs. Floyd was asleep. I wished I could sleep, but I was distracted by what was going on eighteen inches away. His back partially shielded the view, but I saw that his hands were under her skirt.

Abruptly the lights came up and we stopped. Of course *they* couldn't tell the lights were on. Nothing stopped them. The bus driver got out to check the baggage door underneath the bus. He opened it, then let it drop. The thud reverberated against my bottom. He didn't even look at us when he climbed back into the seat. The man was kissing the woman and fumbling with the buttons on her blouse. The lights went down and we swung off again. For the next hour the blind kissed and flopped in the dark, and I squirmed in my seat. Eventually they fell asleep like everybody else but me. I took the opportunity to see if the missionary and the chiropractor had taken all this in, but they were both gone and two other men were asleep in their places.

6: Sacajawea, or From Sea to Shining Sea

When I got to my friends in New York, Toby Redheart answered the door. I couldn't believe it. He was supposed to be in Iowa City. He didn't even know Bert and Jane. They were sitting behind him in the living room, both of them grinning at me.

"Surprised to see me?" he asked. He was grinning like a glare.

"How'd you get here?"

He turned from the door and walked back toward Jane and Bert. Naturally I stepped inside, following him. He whirled

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around and said, "I had a vision of you on the bus. I knew I'd better be here."

"How'd he get here?" I asked Jane and Bert. Bert had his long legs out on the coffee table. Jane's legs were doubled back under her and her guitar was up in her lap. Its neck led off one way, her feet the other. Her lap was enveloped in puffs of green skirt. They thought it was a good joke on me and wouldn't explain. I was getting mad.

Toby snapped his black hair out of his eyes. He was holding a surgeon's scalpel in his hand. Jane and Bert were still smiling. The blade was about a neat inch long, on a handle.

"What's this shit about a vision?" I said.

Toby grabbed me by the forearm with one hand. At the same time he pointed his scalpel hand toward the hallway.

"Into the valley of death rode the five hundred," he said.

Down the hall. Past the bedroom: inside there: sheets, made-up but no bedspread. Into the bathroom. A watermelon floated in the tub.

"Test the water."

I leaned over and shook my fingers in the water.

"What temperature?"

"Lukewarm," I answered.

"That's right. Body temperature. Now if you don't want to fuck me tonight I'm going to take this blade and cut a hole this big"—he made a small circle with his finger and thumb —"and fuck the thunder out of this watermelon."

"You lousy Indian," I said. "You can't blackmail me into doing anything."

"You think about it," he said and led me back into the living room.

"Jesus Christ," I said to Jane, "what's going on here?"

"He's your friend," Jane said. But the way she said it meant that he was their friend, too. "We couldn't keep him out."

"Oh, come on, Trixie," Bert said. "Sit down. Want a beer?"

Toby was standing there, kind of sulky. He had both his

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hands thrust in his bluejean pockets. I don't know what happened to the scalpel.

"I've been singing 'Home on the Range,' " Jane said.

"Well, don't let me stop you," I said and sat down on the sofa. Toby sat down on cross-legs where he'd been standing.

So Jane started to play and sing, and Bert got me some scotch and ice.

Her voice was better than ever. It had an element of pain in it that was new. I wondered what the hell was happening between her and Bert. She sort of sang at Toby in a way I didn't like either. He rolled around on the carpet in different ways. He never would sit on the sofa with me. It had holes in the cover and in one place a wide circle of steel spring obtruded through. I felt like I was still riding forward on the bus. My head was going, but the drink made everything pleasant.

Then I got an idea. I interrupted Jane's singing to tell it—"Trouble in mind: I'm so blue-ue"—she sang it like she hated Bert and loved herself.

"Listen," I said, "listen to this." I'd never interrupted Jane before. "It's a way to get rich. All of us." I started rocking back and forth on the edge of the sofa. "Listen, you know the bicentennial's coming up."

"Whose bicentennial?" Toby said.

"Shut up," I said, "you can be in this, too. Well, what I think is that we need an idea. A way to celebrate. The whole country needs an idea. Everybody. This is it. Look, there're highways all over the country. We make a human chain from New York to San Francisco or to Seattle. People line up on the highways. They hold hands. Each person can reach about five feet, see, with no strain. O.K. How far is it from coast to coast. About 3,000 miles, right? How many feet in a mile —5,280. Multiply by 3,000. That's about lemmesee, fifteen million, eight hundred forty thousand feet. Divide by five. That's three million people. Charge each one a dime for the privilege of being in line. That's $300,000 we collect. We gotta put a patent on this idea. We'll give 'em something to do, too. While they're in line."

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"What?" said Toby.

"A word to pass along. God Bless America."

"No, a touch," Jane said. "At a signal, the person first in line squeezes. Then the squeeze gets carried all across the country."

"From Sea to Shining Sea," I shout. "That's the name of the celebration. Listen, we'll have medals made, and participants can buy an official medal for $1.00. If just *half* take us up on the medal offer, that's a million and a half dollars!!!"

"Why not hook the first person up to an electric generator and send an electric current through the line?" Bert asked.

I thought about this. "It would probably kill the first 500," I said, "if it were powerful enough to get from coast to coast. Human bodies aren't that good a conductor."

Everybody was quiet.

"It won't work," Toby said.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"How you going to police it?"

"He's right," Bert said. "People would break in line."

I slumped back on the sofa.

"Oh, I don't know," Jane said mysteriously. She softly played a chord on the guitar. E minor. "We might work something out." E Major.

Toby lay flat on his back and stared at the ceiling. His short, stumpy body made bumps under his plaid shirt and jeans. His boots pointed up. Jane played, "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You."

Her voice was smooth as muddy Mississippi water. Like muddy water flowing through a very carefully gauged aperture. The Mississippi is the Father of Waters. That's what the Indians said. Why doesn't it mean anything when you look at it? I started drinking beer after the whiskey to quench my thirst. Bert drank beer *with me*. I could see it was getting to Toby.

He never drank at all for fear the alcoholic thing would start. Jane saw how he was getting morose and nudged his boot with her bare toe. Her toenails were painted pearl pink.

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"Hey, Toby, what you want to hear?" she said.

He rocked up a little on his neck and shoulders and let his eyes travel up her leg.

"Anything," he answered.

Jane played "Amazing Grace." I thought it sounded phoney.

"Now play 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,' " Toby said.

She did: "How I wonder what you are"—she sang it into the night, like she ought to. No coy signaling to Toby.

Bert came and sat beside me on the sofa. Her pick for Twinkle was so intricate it sounded like a Mozart music box. Impossible. She used only to strum. Then she played "House of the Rising Sun."

This time I waited till she finished singing.

"O.K. This is it!" I said.

Nobody answered for a moment. Jane stared into my eyes with intense friendliness. Suspense. Suspense. Then she said, "What?"

"The Best Idea of the Night!" Grand pause. "Take 'em out, boys!"

"Huh?": Bert.

"What for?": Toby.

"I'm gonna tell you." Petit pause. "Are you ready?"

Bert reached over and put his hand on my knee, stroked the inside of my knee. Bert caressing me.

"Jane and I'll pet 'em up," I said. "Then we'll wrap 'em in cellophane. Then put on a mold. Salt, flour and water mold. When you go down, you can get out of the mold. Then we take the molds and put wicks in them. Then melt wax. *Voila!* PRICK-WICKS. We'll make a fortune. The Wickedest Candle in America! We'll take out a patent."

"The Original Innocent," Toby said scornfully.

"I will, if you will," Bert answered.

Toby unzipped his jeans and took out his prick. I began to sweat. Bert lay down on the floor beside him. He shucked out of his jeans and then his drawers.

"Here it is," he said to me.

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I got down on the floor beside him and squeezed his soft penis in my hand. I'd never touched one before. Jane put the guitar down and all the strings shivered.

"I'll make the paste," she said. "This is the way we used to make relief maps in geography."

"Want me to help you?" I offered. I let go of Bert's prick.

"No. If I know Bert it'll take a while."

Bert rolled over and hid his front against the dirty rug. He propped his chin up and said he was going to tell a story about what happened during the time he and Jane were separated and he was living in Knoxville going to graduate school. There was a deep U-shaped apartment building he used to walk by. It was old; it was made of yellow glazed bricks. Once he saw a woman inside there with gigantically long hair. It was brown. There were two small ornamental trees inside there—pruned magnolias. Bert saw a cardinal fly out of one of them. The woman held out her wrist and the bird lighted on it. Naturally it was amazing. She looked at the bird in a pleasant way, but she didn't say anything.

Bert said he fell in love with her at once. I said I'd heard of people taming birds. He said he saw her inside the deep U again another day. There was a starling on her head and some other kind of blackbird standing on the palm of her hand. Bert walked into the U and said I want to know you. (The birds had flown off.) "Oh, did you see the birds?" she said with consternation Bert said. He asked her how did you tame those birds. They're not tame she said they're wild birds. What do you do, he asked. She taught at the university. This was a little surprising because she looked about our age. Bert said again that he'd really like to get to know her. She said that she didn't have time to know any more people. She had to write papers to get tenure.

"She was really sorry," Bert told us. "I mean *really,* she wasn't just saying that." He told her maybe tenure wasn't worth that. She said that she had responsibilities. Her father was quite old and she had a lot of younger brothers and sisters. Her mother had been older even than her father and was

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already dead. The children were age five to fifteen. "Isn't that impossible?" Bert had said. They were adopted. "Well, is it fair for all that responsibility to fall on you? I mean it was *their* choice, your parents." She said it was simply her duty as a member of the family. She had to get tenure and take care of them all. She said they were racially mixed and handicapped and needed her. Bert said she was the most beautiful magical person he ever met.

He rolled over and I saw his penis and hair again.

Jane had enjoyed the story. "What about the birds?" she said softly.

"Well, I asked about them again and before she went in she said that she first discovered it in college. She went to Birmingham State just like us. She was sitting out on the hillside and a chipmunk just came and got on the skirt of her dress. She said it was a blue dress, one of her favorites. She was surprised, but after that it often happened, especially with birds. Wild birds just came up to her. She said it was like how some people just have a way with dogs or some other animal. I told her I'd always think of her as Sacajawea. She was kind of pleased."

Jane got up and went in the kitchen to make up the salt, flour and water. It was almost daybreak and I began to notice the street noises more.

"Did you know the Hopi are very religious?" Toby asked me. "They can come and go at will. Over space."

I didn't say anything. ("Appearing and disappearing—*that's the strongest trick there is*," he added.) I hated Bert for telling that story about that woman I could never be.

I stroked him. She stroked Toby. Bert became hard like the book said. The dish of goop and the box of Saran Wrap were between us and her and Toby, but we could both reach them. When I reached over for the Saran Wrap, I saw Toby's, and it was just like Bert's. We put on the wrap, then the goop. It made their pricks look like they were in casts. We made the molds but we didn't melt wax or make candles. After they went down and came out of the forms they went back up

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again. Then we screwed. I screwed Bert in the bedroom.

It was the first time I had been in the horizontal in 33 hours. All the time my head felt like it was still traveling. Finally I began to feel like I was falling, like all of New York was falling down.

Much labor produced no ecstasy.

Bert drew away for the final time. "Baby, you'll be driving six white horses when you come," he said.

What I first saw in the gray morning was soot snowing past the bedroom window. The flakes tapped lightly against the black window screen of the bedroom and then they skittered down to the sidewalk. I could hear feet passing on the pavement and I imagined soot falling next to the falling heels. It fell on thousands of people hurrying on the sidewalks, over all the people crossing the Island, and for miles out to sea, falling on ships and seamen.

[She dreamed of them standing hand-in-hand all across the highways and byways of America. Toby held one of her hands, Bert the other. Toby began to sing, America, the Beautiful. The mountains erupted and penises grew in the cornfields.

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears," she said.

She strung the ears on a necklace. Two of the ears were stuck together, like a locket. She opened the locket: and the two ears then formed the shape of a heart. The heart she wore in the center of the necklace, over her heart.

"I left my heart in San Francisco," she said, "deep in the heart of Texas."

That being the case, it would be impossible for her to marry Toby Redheart.]

Screwing. It's like a gospel. When you walk in a classroom you look down the rows. You see who looks receptive. You wonder if he's got your brand. You don't talk: it's all body language. I learned it from Jane's pink-nailed toe. I teach in a university.

Toby Redheart went from New York to Arizona. He flew.

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He became a social worker for his own people, the Hopi. When I got back to Iowa, I sent Mrs. Mamie Floyd all my lovely, left-over Easter bonnets. I didn't do it anonymously. I signed my name and all. She wrote me a Thank You. The chemistry specialty I decided on was polymer plastics.

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Jeanne Hill

The Jack Rabbit

riding in the pick-up
between the father and the son

I hardly know the older
the profile tall like a silo
the sinews working in his forearms
like cables

and he doubts me
in his land of sheep and maize
but his son has brought me
and that's enough

talk of catfish in the stock tank
wild turkeys in a thicket over the ridge

a sudden halt
jack rabbit in the road ahead
long-eared brother of the mesquite
hind legs over-sized like roots
frozen to that spot of earth

the rifle which has lain across the old man's lap
and out the window
is raised

I think I hear something spoken under his breath

and lowered without a shot

later the other man
the one I know
he tells me
his father chose to spare me

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David Ray

The First Time

That woman on the beach camouflaged
in sand (in California where
they have Satanic rituals now)
said nothing our first time round
—both virgins, and what a time
you had to bleed, virgin plus
the curse—but we laughed and washed
off in the sea and were going to have
a second try when she began to cackle
like a harpy. We hadn't seen her—
half buried in the sand, some sun
bather, shrill weirdo who'd kept
quiet the first time round. We picked
up our clothes and ran, humiliated.
You with that red and dripping bush
and I with my sea-salt wong shrunk up
from fear, crawled along seven cliff
edges back. That night we stopped
in Tijuana to do it right. You
waited on a corner while I got
the room. We had redundant rubbers
too. Six sailors tried to pick you
up, but we pushed past them
to that room and left it bloody
then drove away as from a crime.
You forgot your glasses, fifty miles
up North. If only we could have
stopped there, in the deep cactus
forest, decided how to save our love!
But we rushed on, into the sharp beaks
of harpies, your dipso mother, and God
knows how many had to have a piece
of us one way or the other—prime
meat—gorgeous, freckled, Renoir you,
Apollo me. So that we have been
without each other now, for thirty years.

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David Romtvedt

Pockets

This pair of pants has four pockets.
It can be seen how lovely they all are
carrying their duty-free cargo and passing
through every door they come to. They
go everywhere the pants they are attached
to go. It would be silly to do otherwise;
make a break for it, as it were.

Sometimes as the pants go through doors a hand
takes from the pockets a ticket. Rarely
do the pockets find themselves well acquainted
with these tickets. The hand takes the ticket,
holds it for a moment, then passes it on
to another hand which, again, rarely covers
the ticket with the close darkness of a pocket.
Even more fantastic would be pretending
the pockets ask themselves about these tickets.

If the pockets are not full there is room
for the hands alone. Sometimes the hands
are like glass, that is they are stiff or they
are cold or they shatter and settle, many
small pieces in the bottoms of the pockets.
Then the pockets are cocoons and the hands
later come crashing loose flapping their fingers
like some goofball moth the pockets have never seen.

Legs and feet are important to pockets too, for without
these there would be no pants and pockets would find
themselves tacked solely on breasts or sewn boldly
on the side of a biceps, to be used as no more
than a cigarette holder or waiting room for greasy combs.
Yes, this way the pockets roll carelessly across
the earth, pass through air or water or anywhere
else the pants can think to go.

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Two Poems by F. Keith Wahle

A Man

A man decides to wear a baby instead of a hat.
Sometimes the baby pisses and shits on his head,
but the man doesn't care. He is in all other
respects a reserved and courteous gentleman.
He always removes his baby in the house.
He holds his baby over his heart
when the National Anthem is played.
And when he passes a lady on the street,
he never fails to tip his baby.

The Love Affair

He wakes up dreaming of college girls—
wasting another bogus life. Nights
spent hustling cigarettes, days in a
cheap hotel. He returns to the same
blindness, an alley of alcohol.
There he sees you, stranger, woman of
his furious dreams—angel leaning
with your wings against the dirty bricks.
Your eyes are deep as snowdrifts, your lips
like quicksand, teeth like beautiful knives.

Your father's jewels hang down between your
breasts like curses. You want to enter
his tennis court of vicious desires.
He stands there smoothing down his mustache.
Your love grows oddly useful then, in
the darkness of this city, a strange

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city, guarded by spiders. The birds
in the little park grin like demons.
Together you move into the old
abandoned theatre down the street.

At night he pulls a baby from your
lips. The sky grows brittle with spring. How
drab his nudity begins to seem
in this nation of taxidermy!
Now is the season when motors get
their fur, and orphans go up in smoke.
His face begins to weaken in the
middle of a smile. You bury your
fingers in his heart like nails. Around
a campfire, the wives begin to bark.

Deep in his summer of guilt, the gods
of ignorance come and take away
the valuable engines of his mind.
His gun slows down and stops. He crouches
like a maimed animal in your heat.
He spits out gloves, losing his soul in
a cough. Thunder falls from the sky like
rags. But all he can hear is the flap
of your breasts as you run from the farm
where you were almost kindled and raped.

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Rape of Lucrece Retold

a Roman woman whose suicide, after her rape by a son of Tarquin the Proud, led to the expulsion of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Roman republic

—Random House Dictionary
of the English Language

In her dream
the wind blew her vagina out the bedroom
down the Spanish steps
into the moonlit alleys.
There's no need to say much
not much about such a freeflying vagina.
Tarquin Jr., son of Tarquin the Proud
stood by his draperies scratching his insomnia
thinking of poems
when it fluttered like a butterfly
gone crazy for his nose.
He grabbed it:
he only wanted to write a poem
but when he touched its soft lips
it whispered its maiden name
& he broke into nervous laughter.
Before dawn another gust returned it
to Lucrece dreaming of levitation.
Tarquin Jr., had planted kisses
& tied Turkish ribbons to each pubic hair.
The Roman republic was never quite the same.

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Dean Faulwell

Elegy for Maria

Maria, you are dead.
But you probably knew that.
We miss you.
We miss the 89¢ worth of chemicals
of which (with inflation) you are said to have consisted
(although we have also been given to understand
that as your body decomposes
these at least will be returned to us).
We miss the 90% of you
that was water
and that in better times
was all contained rather neatly within what for want of a
better term we shall have to call your "form"
but which has now been allowed
to I don't know "evaporate" I guess
until all that remains
is just so much steam
hissing away into some forgotten corner
of the universe.
"There goes Maria
hissing off into space,"
we almost feel like saying
each time an otherwise innocent event
(the lighting of a fly
on the rump of an actually now that I think about it
not-very-attractive horse)
forces us to remember you.
Yes, we miss you,
but not enough to make us
want to dig up your body to see what you look like.
We *know* what you look like, Maria.
You're—well—hideous.
Yes, I'm sorry to have to say it, but you are.

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You're just bones now, Maria,
and it's lucky at least that you're buried
because if you weren't buried,
you'd be hanging in some doctor's office
looking ridiculous
and scaring poor little kids
half out of their wits
each time they had to visit the doctor
only to find you hanging there
in all your terrifying whiteness.
Thank your lucky stars
there was enough money
to buy you a decent grave
in which to rest your weary bones, Maria,
and that you're not required
to spend the rest of your days
playing spook to a succession of poor little children.
Maria, is it cold where you are?
Jeremy says it must be.
In fact, yesterday, as a test,
he went over to the neighbors'
to where some workmen
are digging a hole
for an I don't know septic tank or something
and climbed in
and then later came back home
and said the hole was downright chilly.
I'm sorry about that, Maria.
I wish there were something we could do about it,
but there isn't.
Of course, I guess we could have buried you in a tree,
but then, as you know,
there aren't many trees around here,
and, besides, the birds would have come
and pecked your eyes out,
and I know you wouldn't have liked that
as you were always very proud of your eyes,
although I personally could never figure out why,

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since, to me, there was never anything terribly unusual
about them.
As far as I could tell, they were just eyes.
But then I guess every person has to have something to be
proud of,
even a person who
(if I may speak plainly, Maria)
has never ceased to remind me
of the way a horse looks
as it's being led away
to I don't know
"greener pastures" or something.
Oh, I know all about how you could cross your eyes at will
and then make them straighten out again
and that you always thought this was just about the most
stupendous stunt
ever performed by mortal being,
but the truth is, Maria,
we only *pretended*
to be amused.
Actually we found your trick a little disgusting
and would have asked you to please stop
except that we knew how proud you were of it.
And, well, God knows we didn't want to take away the
only reason
you had for being proud.
Well, that's about all
I can think of to say,
Maria, and so just remember
we *do* miss you,
if not exactly constantly,
then at least each time a fly
lights on the rump
of a not-very-attractive horse
and makes us think:
"Well, there goes Maria
trotting off into I don't know space."

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Richard Stull

The Islands

Like dots before your eyes, the ships
Roll in on the new tide and drop anchor.
"They will go away," you think. But later
When you turn again, they're still there,
Still blocking the rest of your island paradise
From view. You see the men in uniform
Stepping down into the longboats, then
The endless ripple of water as you lie back
And close your eyes: "It has all happened
So many times before—the ships, the men.
And always when they seemed to beckon
And I went to them, the bay was empty.
But now I am aware of their ways:
This time they will come to me." Overhead,
The wind scrapes through palms that droop
Almost to where you can touch them. You hear
Nothing but stones tumbling in the sea.

Morning comes and still no visitors,
No signal shots from the harbor.
Perhaps it was all a dumb romantic idea—
Thinking yourself of some importance to them.
They have come for supplies or laborers,
Not to talk with you. They probably
Don't even know you live here; and if they did,
What makes you think they would care?
And what would happen if a runner were sent
To tell them of the man who refuses
To leave? Trained in military law
And navigation, what could a sea captain
Know of all this? What could he say?
Even if you told him yourself how one day
In your apartment in the city you imagined

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The islands rising on the horizon—
At first smudges on the blue, then
Shapely, with the yellow blades of sand—
Maybe he would understand, maybe not.

Chances are he would say you were crazy
Or touched by tropical fever. And in the end
He would think you wanted to leave,
But you would stay. For you know
These islands and your life on them
Represent more than a haphazard escape
From the regular patterns of behavior.
Nor are you one of those daydreamers
Who envies everyone with money.
And finally, what do you want from anyone
That you can't give yourself.
You stare into the even blue of the sky,
The deep green and torquoise sea;
And though you are sometimes saddened
By its outward isolation, you are happy
With this life you have made,
And so allow yourself its pleasures
As night comes on and even the ships have vanished.

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Michael Sheridan

Love Poem

"Do you realize," I asked, after biting the sensitive
Spot on her shoulder, "that Darius was incited
To attack the Greeks by a homesick physician in his court?"
I lowered my ear to her tongue.

"Philip of Macedon's first years of kingship
Were devoted, consequently, to the discipline of his army,"
She whispered, gasping as I put my lips to her breast.
"Yes," I replied, "he created the charging cavalry."

At last her feverish hand found my penis
And drew it to her open, wet vagina.
"Olympias paid the same funeral honors to the murderer's
Memory as she did to her dead Philip," she moaned.

My strokes were deep and rhythmical, my breath short,
But I managed to say: "Alexander destroyed
Tyre, and Gaza, and a city in India; and of the latter
Not a soul, not a child, was spared!"

Afterwards she sighed, "The fusing of one god with another
Is called *theocrasia,* and nowhere was it more vigorously
Going on than in Alexandria." She had moved to 250 B.C.,
Of course, but I said nothing, preferring to rest for a while.

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Joel Stein

A Gift For You

for Penelope

I have a gift for you.
Please open it now
For inside you will find the words
To say when you are flustered
And stumbling around in the dark
Ruins of your confidence;
They will look like tumbled blocks
Of wood with big letters painted on.

Look further in this package
And you will find a dress
Which when you slip over your shoulders
Will fill your body with grace
And allow you to move easily
Through the party of dignitaries
And smile arrogantly but kindly
At their insipid advice;
And it will let you lounge
By the swimming pool of your heart
Where you can take a dip
And refresh yourself
Under the hard light of the world.

And there are some shoes for you
Which will make you light on your feet
And step quickly to a sudden tune
Of your own invention, run freely
Down crowded streets and catch all
The buses and taxis in the world.

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And there is also a mirror for you
Which when looked into by only you
Will tell you your every mood,
How to alter slightly the afternoons
Of sudden downpours and feel better about yourself
When you aren't sure if you have talent or wit.
This mirror will relax all sneers
And will warn you of predators prowling
In the waters near the shore of well being.
And most of all it will always look
Back at you with more kindness
Than you can ever bestow upon the surface
Of its unfathomable world.

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The Red Sculpture

Gilbert and George

My first acquaintance with Gilbert and George was in London early in 1971. "Acquaintance," as a matter of fact, isn't quite the word. It was just off the Kings Road in the apartment of an art dealer, and Gilbert and George were presenting the piece entitled *Singing Sculpture*. It went thus. Gilbert and George were standing on a small, square table, moving through an elaborate sequence of jerky poses, and singing along, while an antique gramophone labored through that classic of the music halls, 'Underneath the Arches.' Also, they twirled canes, and the overall effect of fun-house automata was not lessened by their faces slickly glittering with metallic paint.

The presentation lasted a week, with Gilbert and George keeping it up seven hours a day. So flawless were they that, one was told, a few people had left convinced that the artists were, in fact, cunningly constructed robots. On the occasion of my second visit, an expensively tailored drunk was imploring the pair to "perform" at some forthcoming party. They ignored him utterly, as they ignored the world. The man was persuaded to leave, still waving fistfuls of bank-notes in fuming impotence; a pleasant sight in any art gallery. A presentation of *Singing Sculpture* at the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, later the same year, confirmed it. Gilbert and George had staked a claim somewhere off the edge of the map, and found a workable lode.

Over the subsequent few years, Gilbert and George pursued the role of Living Sculpture with the utmost rigor. There was a Pastoral Period: huge, and hugely elegant drawings and paintings, showing the pair amongst sylvan scenes which might have excited the admiration of Monet, called *With Us In Nature*.

Further Periods followed. A Drinking Period. A Red Boxer Period. Gilbert and George are austerely conscious of what they are up to, and what they are up to is nothing if not ambitious: Living Art History.

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The house which Gilbert and George have shared for seven years is in Fournier Street, which is in the East End of London. Always low rent, sometimes violent, increasingly ethnic. A plaque outside announces that the house is to be preserved. A landmark. Eighteenth Century, the period of decorum. Decorum and possibilities of violence. It seemed an apt setting for Gilbert and George.

It was George who opened the door. George controls most dealings with the outer world. He led me into a severe front room (stripped panelling, two chairs, a table) and introduced me to Gilbert. I made conversational overtures of the usual inanity. They responded courteously, and froze into poses. Gilbert; arm crooked, leaning, body slightly arched, against a wall. George; one hand lightly clasping an elbow, the fingers of the other laid along the chin and cheek. Both; unblinking eyes, slight smiles. Betokening, it seemed, *Polite Attention.*

Gilbert and George are now in their early thirties. They first met at a London art college, and have worked ensemble since. Gilbert is Italian, of German extraction. He is the slighter one, smooth, dark, a stock-company matinée idol. George is English, with a pale skin, and a mild, scholarly demeanour. His modulated accents suggest a minor public school. Somebody once told me their surnames, but I have forgotten them. Anyway, they don't matter. Gilbert and George have discarded all "biography" irrelevant to their status as art objects.

They were dressed as they are always dressed; in tweed suits of identical shapeless cut, differing only in color (George's was blue-grey, and Gilbert's brown). The buttons were covered in the same material, the lapels were narrow, and they were wearing white shirts with the slightly papery look that suggests a suburban chain store. Also, black lace-up shoes not overly polished, and ties—again identical, except for color—patterned with miniature London Scenes (for instance, Nelson's Column).

If I dwell on this in some detail it is because this, also, is part of their work. The effect is often described as Edwardian, though it actually rather resembles the Edwardian revival of the 50s, but neither reference delights the artists. "In general," George said, "we don't take kindly to people saying we derive from other periods."

He was smoking a Gold Flake with fastidious precision, but there was a certain undertone of threat. Beneath the polished surface, energies vibrate. "We hate it if somebody says something inappropriate to our work," said George. "*Stinky* people! And we don't blame ourselves. We blame them. For their stupidity."

They especially despise Formalism. "The balance is totally upset," George said. Their own work, he explained, is *emotional*. He indicated some of the "Mental" series: black and white views laid out like a sheet of picture postcards, with red images of Gilbert and George inlaid, a fierce ruby cross. "We are not interested in the formal picture-making side of it," George added. "If we are ourselves with our art, and if the viewer is with us, what more can we want?"

"Their feelings can be as rich as ours," noted Gilbert.

Do they ever relax? Do they ever, like computers, come off-line?

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"We work very little," George said.

"The relaxing is the work," said Gilbert.

"The sculpture takes up a minute part of our time," said George.

How do they distinguish between those parts of their life which are germane as art material, and those which aren't?

"I don't know *how* we draw the line," said George.

Dark Shadow is the book they have most recently completed. It includes the Drinking Period, during which the artists regularly got stinking on Gordon's gin (a careful choice, being a favorite secret tipple of respectable maiden aunts), while photographic records were maintained.

Drinking was succeeded by Kung Fu. "We have just been through a period of Chinese films," Gilbert added. "There are two or three little Chinese clubs in Soho where you can see the real ones. We don't like Bruce Lee."

"We like the ones about the Shao Lin monks," George said.

The elegance, the savagery. The supreme poses. Out of this interest emerged The Red Sculpture (tableaux from which are reproduced here). During the piece which lasts one-and-a-half hours, the artists, heads and hands dyed a deep vermilion, move about like meticulous, wide-eyed somnambulists. They premiered the piece in Japan.

"It was amazing," said Gilbert. "They were very excited. But they were much more silent than *we* were."

"In the West people are always shrugging and coughing," said George.

They acknowledge a kabuki influence, but a touch dismissively. "We don't much like performing art, because we are always being compared with it," George said.

The boxing image, however, seems to have adhered. They showed me two large portraits of themselves by the elderly Bloomsbury portraitist, Duncan Grant. The paintings are gouaches, depicting Gilbert confronting George against swirling backgrounds of red and orange. Something menacing hangs in the atmosphere.

The Grant portraits are two of several. There is a Warhol. Also photographs by Cecil Beaton and the maestro—"He's so *young*," noted Gilbert —Horst.

Ideally, they would like a painting of themselves by a ranking artist for every year of their lives, and they would like to do their own shows every month. Living Sculpture.

"If a painter painted a picture *every day*," said George, "Picasso had different subjects. But mostly he painted himself."

"If one had a Picasso for every year of his life," suggested Gilbert.

"It's like the difference between an acquaintance and a friend," said George.

They are entirely secure about their place in art history. George detailed one specific line of succession. "Van Gogh . . . Picasso . . . Francis Bacon . . . and us . . . "

Simultaneously, they congealed, assuming poses of splendid tranquility and careful attentiveness.

—Anthony Haden-Guest

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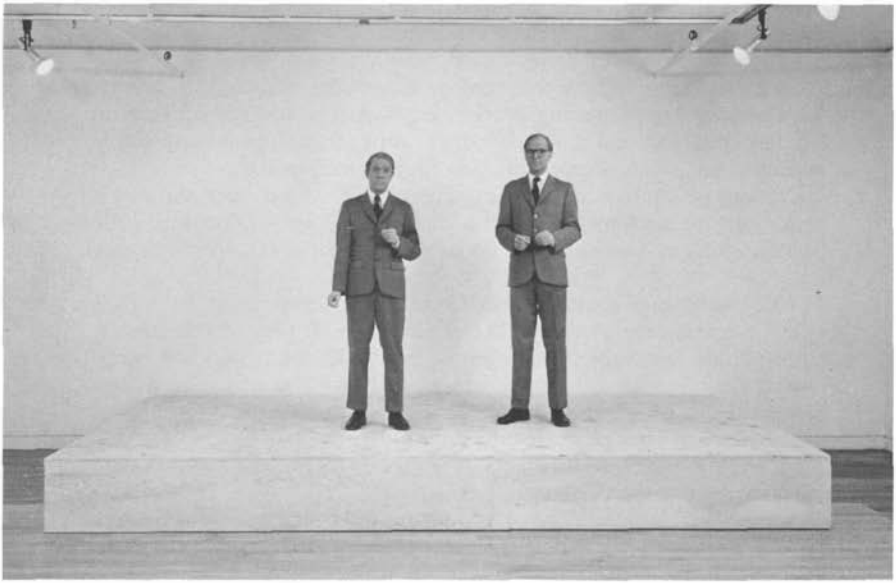
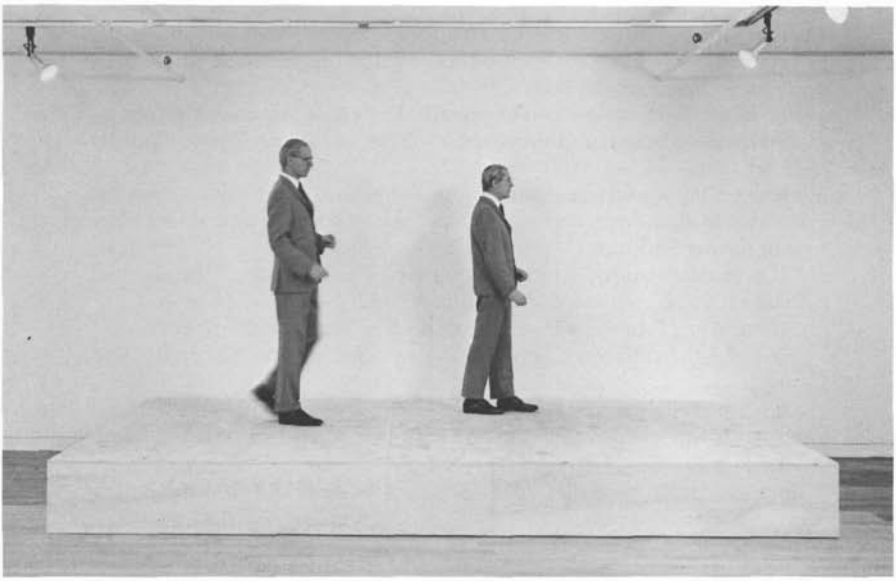


The Red Sculpture



Dark Shadow and Human Bondage

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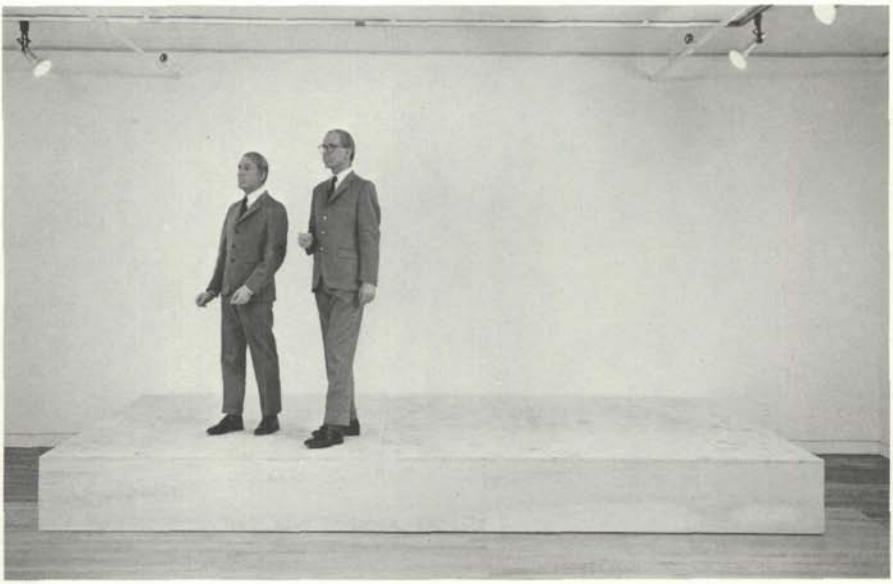
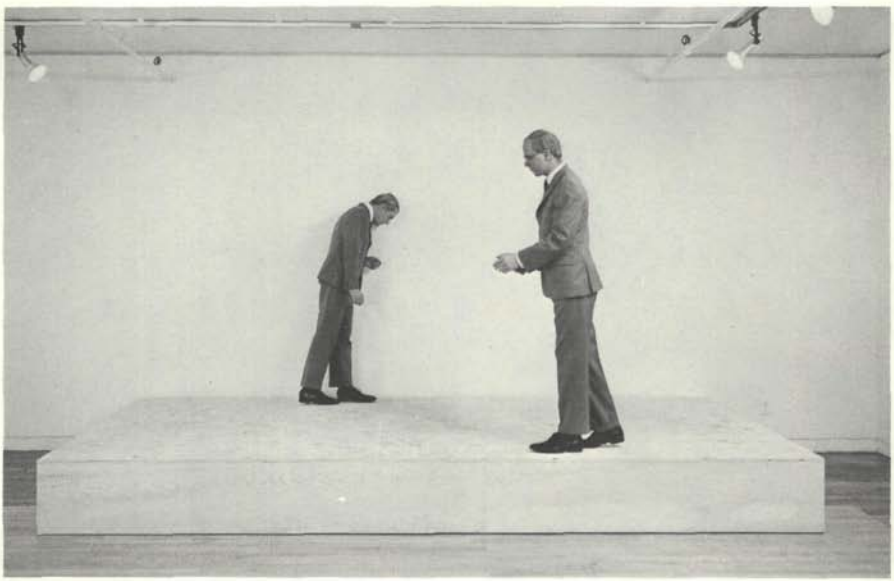


Ready



Cherry Blossom

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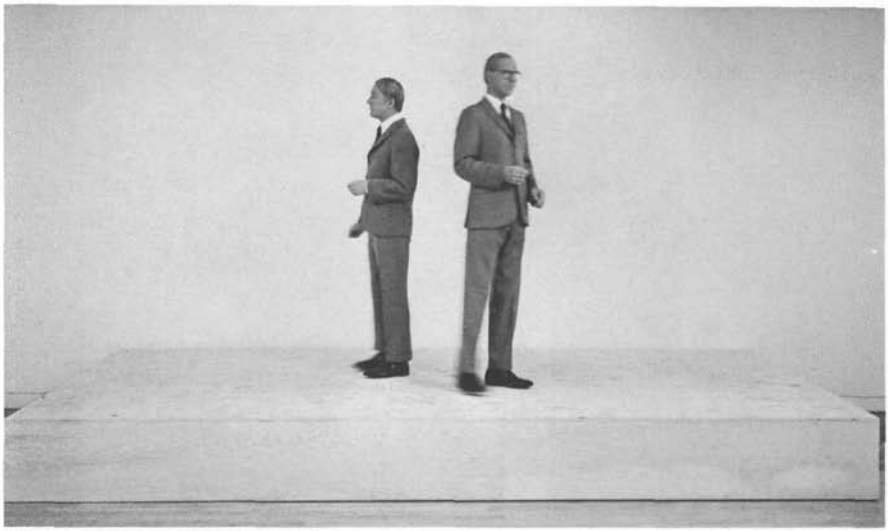
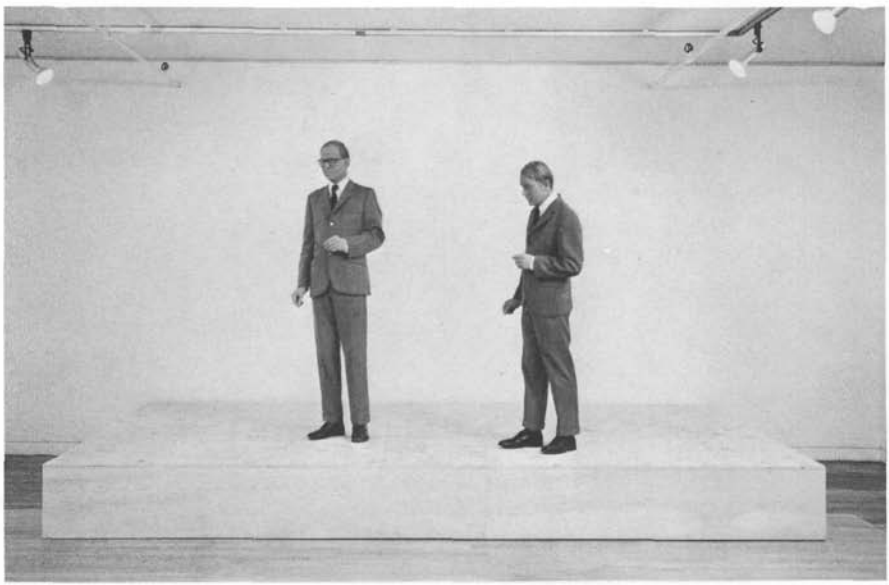


Bad Thoughts and Broken Hearts



Coming

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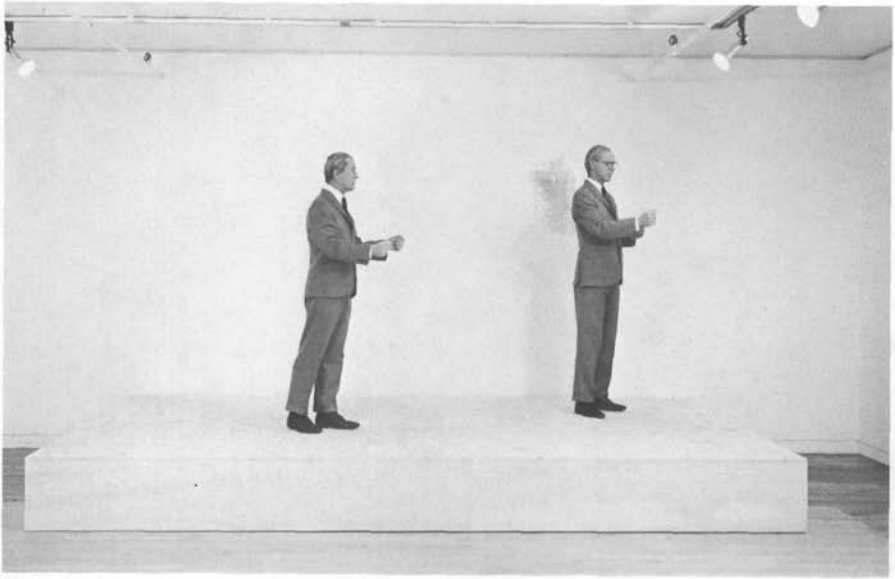
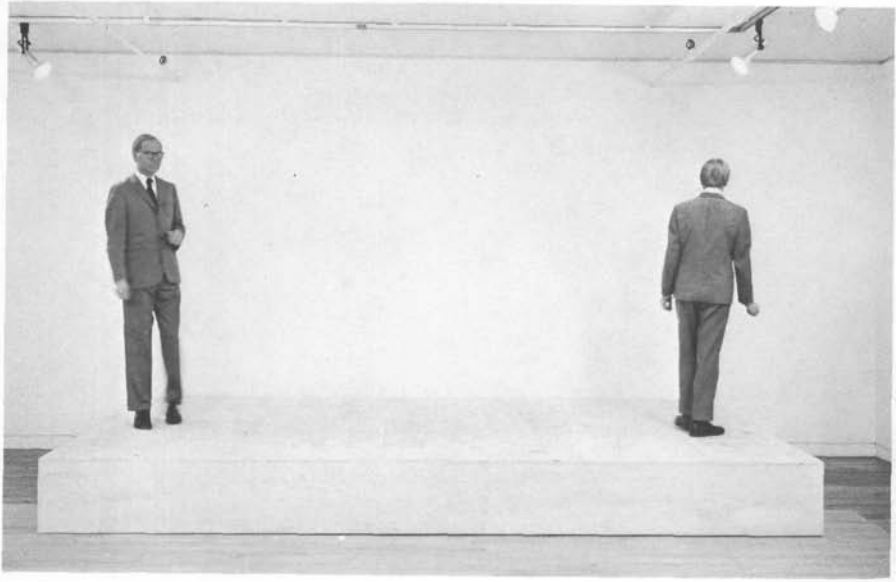


Wooden Air



Bloody Life and Dusty Corners

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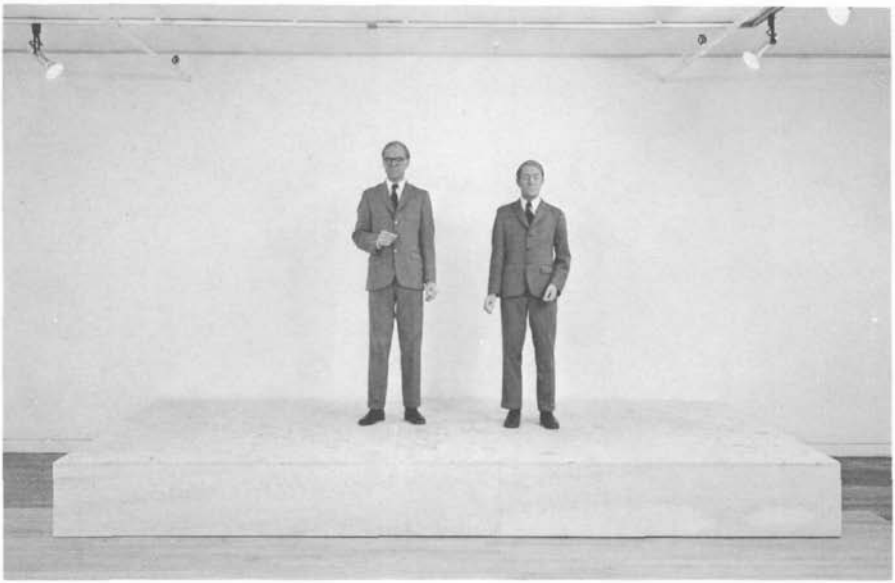
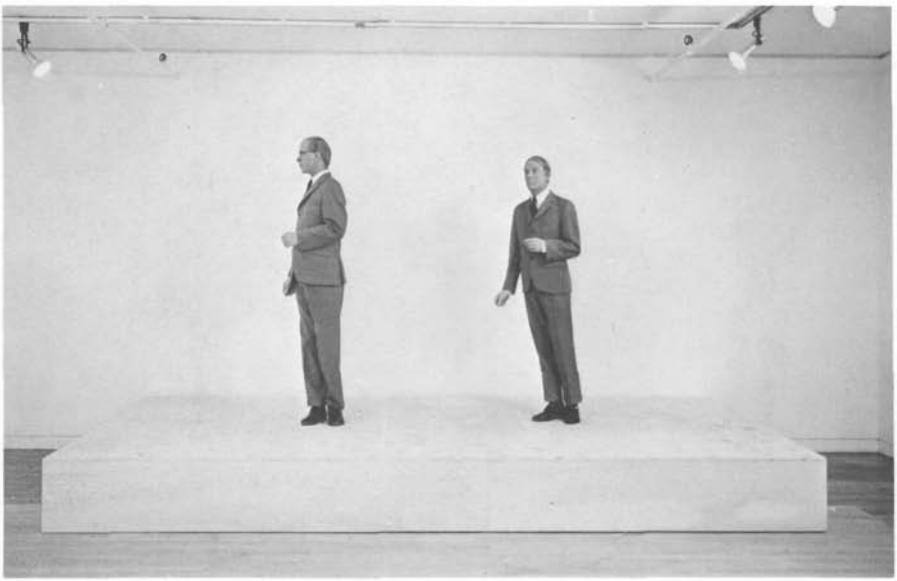


Gone



Red Boxers

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John Updike

Dutch Cleanser

My grandmother used it, Dutch Cleanser,
in the dark Shillington halls,
in the kitchen darkened by the grape arbor,
and I was frightened of the lady on the can.
Why was she carrying a stick?
Why couldn't we see her face?

Now, an aging modern man,
estranged, alone, and medium gray,
I tip Dutch Cleanser onto a sponge,
here in this narrow bathroom,
where the ventilator fan has to rumble
when all I want to switch on is light.

Tipping the can, I tower above
that worried boy; the closet stack
of daily papers has burst the roof.
Deutsche Grossmutter, I am here; look up.
You have changed, I have changed,
Dutch Cleanser has changed not at all.

The lady is still upholding the stick
chasing dirt, and her face
is so angry we dare not see it.
The dirt she is chasing is ahead of her,
around the can, like a minute hand
the hour hand pushes around.

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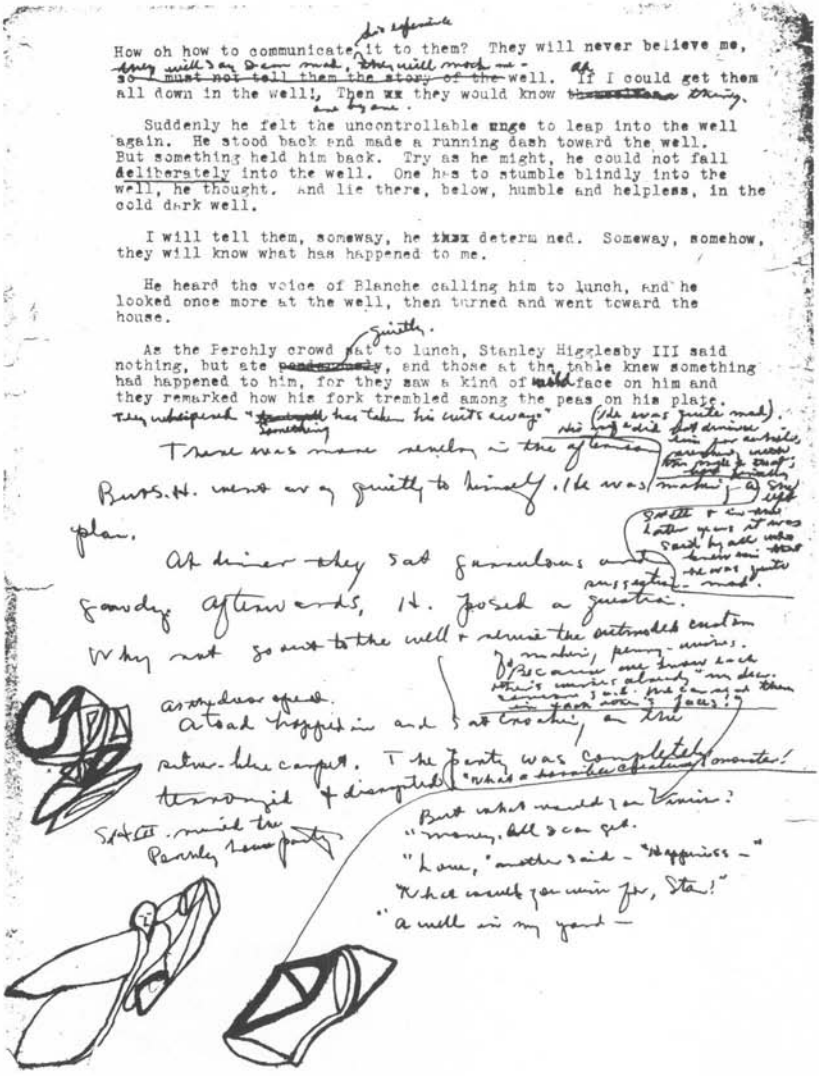

How oh how to communicate it to them? They will never believe me, they will say I am mad, they will mock me - so I must not tell them the story of the well. If I could get them all down in the well, Then they would know and by and.

Suddenly he felt the uncontrollable urge to leap into the well again. He stood back and made a running dash toward the well. But something held him back. Try as he might, he could not fall deliberately into the well. One has to stumble blindly into the well, he thought. And lie there, below, humble and helpless, in the cold dark well.

I will tell them, someway, he determined. Someway, somehow, they will know what has happened to me.

He heard the voice of Blanche calling him to lunch, and he looked once more at the well, then turned and went toward the house.

As the Perchly crowd sat to lunch, Stanley Higglesby III said nothing, but ate guiltily, and those at the table knew something had happened to him, for they saw a kind of guilty face on him and they remarked how his fork trembled among the peas on his plate.

There was more secrecy in the afternoon. But S.H. went on guiltily to himself. He was making plans.

At dinner they sat gloomily and gawdy afterwards, H. posed a question. Why not go out to the well + revive the extended custom of making penny wishes. Because we know each other's wishes already "my dear" "what a beautiful evening" and then asparagus speed. A toad hopped in and sat croaking on the [illegible] like carpet. The party was completely demoralized + disrupted.

But what would you wish?
"money, all I can get.
"Love," another said - "Happiness -"
"What would you wish for, Stan!"
"a mill in my yard —

A manuscript page from "The Well," an unpublished short story by William Goyen

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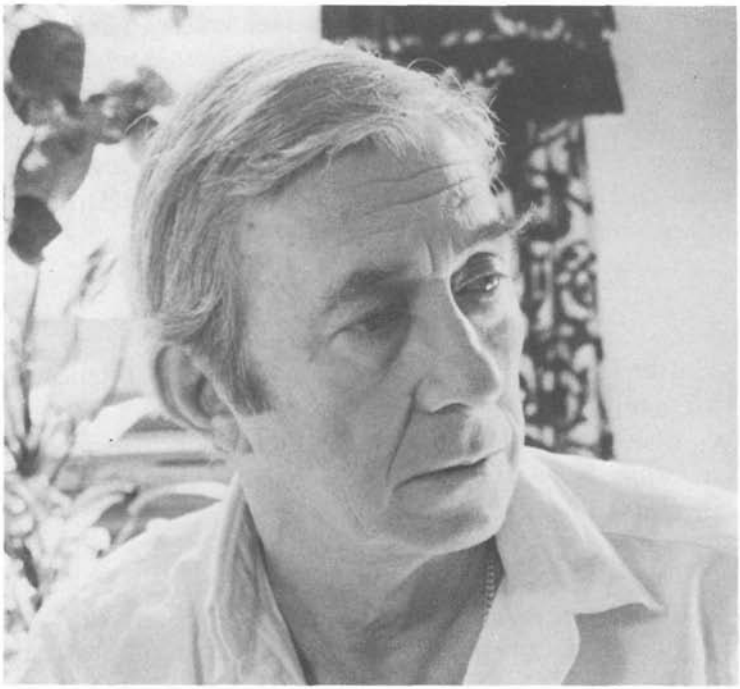
William Goyen
The Art of Fiction LXIII



Thomas Victor

The interview with William Goyen took place on a sunny Saturday afternoon in June 1975—the spring of Goyen's sixtieth birthday and also of the publication of the 25th Anniversary Edition of his first novel, The House of Breath, *a book which became a literary sensation upon its first appearance in 1950. Since that time he has published* Ghost and Flesh *(1952),* In a Farther Country *(1955),* The Faces of Blood Kindred *(1960),* The Fair Sister *(1962),* A Book of Jesus *(non-fiction, 1973),* Come, the Restorer *(1974), and* Nine Poems *(1076). Goyen's* Selected Writings *appeared in 1974, and his impressive* Collected Stories *late in 1975. Four of his plays have been produced. During 1976-77 he was Writer-in-Residence at*

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Princeton University. He is married to the actress Doris Roberts.

Taped over a three-hour period in the home of a friend in Katonah, New York, Mr. Goyen remained seated on a sofa throughout the interview, sipping a soft drink. He requested that baroque music be played over the stereo, "to break the silences." There were *silences—long, considering pauses between thoughts.*

William Goyen is slender, lanky, and a handsome figure at sixty. His aspect is intense and patrician, his manner gracious and courtly. Goyen's hair is silver: he speaks with a strong Southwestern accent.

INTERVIEWER

In the Introduction to your *Selected Writings,* you stated that you began writing at the age of sixteen, at a time when you were also interested in composing and dancing and other art forms. Why writing as a career rather than one of the other arts?

GOYEN

My foremost ambition, as a very young person, was to be a composer, but my father was strongly opposed to my studying music—that was for girls. He was from a sawmill family who made strict a division between a male's work and a female's. (The result was quite a confusion of sex-roles in later life: incapable men and over-sexed women among his own brothers and sisters.) He was so violently against my studying music that he would not allow me even to play the piano in our house. Only my sister was allowed to put a finger to the keyboard . . . the piano had been bought for her. My sister quickly tired of her instrument, and when my father was away from the house, I merrily played away, improving upon my sister's Etudes—which I had learned by ear—and indulging in grand Mozartian fantasies. In the novel *The House of Breath*, Boy Ganchion secretly plays a "cardboard piano," a paper keyboard pasted on a piece of cardboard in a hidden

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corner. I actually did this as a boy. My mother secretly cut it out of the local newspaper and sent off a coupon for beginners' music lessons. I straightaway devised Liszt-like concerti and romantic overtures. And so silent arts were mine: I began writing. No one could hear that, or know that I was doing it, even as with the cardboard piano.

INTERVIEWER

You weren't having to write under the sheets with a flashlight, were you?

GOYEN

You know, I *was* playing my music under the quilt at night, quite literally. I had a little record player and I played what music I could under the quilt and later wrote that way. So I did write under the sheets.

INTERVIEWER

What was your father's reaction to writing?

GOYEN

Something of the same. He discovered it some years later, when I was an undergraduate at Rice University in Houston. He found me writing plays, and to him the theatre, like the piano, was an engine of corruption which bred effeminate men (God knows he was generally right, I came to see), sexual libertines (right again!), and a band of gypsies flaunting their shadowed eyes and tinselled tights at reality. When my first novel was published, my father's fears and accusations were justified—despite the success of the book—and he was outraged to the point of not speaking to me for nearly a year.

This could, of course, have been because the book was mostly about his own family—the sawmill family I spoke of earlier. My father, his brothers, his father, everybody else were lumber people, around mills . . . and forests. I went around the sawmills with him, you see, and saw all that. He loved trees so! My God, he would . . . he'd just *touch*

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trees . . . they were human beings. He would smell wood and trees. He just loved them. He knew wood. He was really meant for that.

Poor beloved man, though, he later came around to my side and became the scourge of local bookstores, making weekly rounds to check their stock of my book. He must have bought a hundred copies for his lumbermen friends. God knows what *they* thought of it. Before he died he had become my ardent admirer, and my *Selected Writings* is dedicated to him.

INTERVIEWER

Do you agree with the theory that an unhappy childhood is essential to the formation of exceptional gifts? Were you genuinely unhappy?

GOYEN

How could it have been any other way? My own nature was one that would have made it that way. It was a melancholy childhood. It was a childhood that was searching for—or that *needed*—every kind of compensation it could get. I think that's what makes an artist. So that I looked for compensation to fulfill what was not there.

INTERVIEWER

How have the physical conditions of your writing changed over the years? What is the relation between the creative act and privacy for you, today? In your *Note* on the 25th Anniversary Edition of *The House of Breath*, you stated that part of the novel was written on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

GOYEN

Since my writing began in the air of secrecy, indeed, of alienation—as the work had to be done without anyone's knowing it—forever after my work has had about it the air of someone in solitude having done it, alienated from the press of society and the everyday movements of life.

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On the ship, where I continued working, I found that there are many hidden places on an aircraft carrier where one can hide out and do secret work. And this was easily achieved. Also on the night watches and so forth, there was a lot of time. There is a great deal of free time aboard a ship in wartime, ironically. This kind of tradition in my work has been mine all my life, and I have generally lived in hidden places. In New Mexico it was at the beautiful foot of a mountain (the Sangre de Cristo in the primitive village of El Prado), and also in a mysterious mountain (Kiowa Mountain —the D.H. Lawrence Ranch called Kiowa Ranch, over San Cristobal, New Mexico, near Taos). And in Europe—Zurich, Rome—I worked in backstreet *pensions*.

Yet more and more, as I get more worldly and have the security of having survived, I feel that it is not necessary to be *that* far removed from the workings of daily life and the daily lives of people. Indeed, the older I get and the more I write, the more I feel it important to be a part of daily life . . . to know that it surrounds me as I work. I presently live in a large apartment on the West Side of New York City. One of those rooms is mine, and it's an absolute hideaway, yet all around me in the other rooms the life of a family goes on, and I like to know that. I also like to know that twelve flights down I can step onto the street in the midst of a lot of human beings and feel a part of those. Whereas, in the old days, in New Mexico, I was brought up—taught by—Frieda Lawrence to see that simple manual endeavor is part of art. I would work in gardens and dig water ditches and walk in mountains and along rivers when I was not writing, and I felt that it was absolutely essential to my work. That's changing for me now. I'm more city-prone. Maybe the world is changing, too. Maybe solitude is best had in the midst of multitudes.

It's amazing how quickly something gets written. Now, when it comes, it can be on a bus, or in a store. I've stopped in Macy's and written on a dry goods counter and then suddenly had a whole piece of writing for myself that was accomplished, where earlier in my life I felt I had to spend a week in

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a house somewhere in the country in order to get that. Conditions change.

INTERVIEWER

Some say that poverty is ennobling to the soul. Is economic stability helpful to a writer? On the other hand, do you think wealth can be harmful?

GOYEN

It can be harmful. This depends on the stage in a writer's life, of course. As a young man, for me . . . I speak now not as a wealthy or an impoverished man, but as a man looking back when he was younger . . . it was imperative that I live *very* simply and economically. Living in Taos where—who would have believed it then fifteen or twenty years later, a whole migration of young hippies would come to live and meditate in the desert just where I had lived—I was totally solitary. It was imperative for me and my work that I keep everything simple and have practically nothing at all. I lived in just a mud house with a dirt floor on land that Frieda Lawrence gave me out of friendship. I built it with a friend and a couple of Indians. Yet, to live in absolute poverty all his life could harm a writer's work. The hardship and worry over money in writers as they get older is a social horror; grants given to writers should be *sufficient*, so that they are able to live with amplitude and, yes, some dignity.

INTERVIEWER

The genesis of it all goes back to that aircraft carrier, doesn't it?

GOYEN

I thought I was going to die in the war. I was on a terrible ship. It was the Casablanca, the first baby flattop. There were always holes in it, and people dying and it was just the worst place for me to be. I really was desperate. I just wanted to jump off. I thought I was going to die anyway, be killed, and

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I wanted to die because I couldn't endure what looked like an endless way of life with which I had nothing to do—the war, the ship, and the water . . . I have been terrified of water all my life. I would have fits when I got close to it.

Suddenly—it was out on a deck in the cold—I saw the breath that came from me. And I thought that the simplest thing that I know is what I belong to and where I came from and I just called out to my family as I stood there that night, and it just . . . I saw this breath come from me and I thought—in that breath, in that call, is *their* existence, is their reality . . . and I must shape that and I must write about them—*The House of Breath*.

I saw this whole thing. I saw what was going to be four-five years' work. Isn't that amazing? But I knew it was there. Many of my stories happen that way. It's dangerous to tell my students this because then these young people say, "Gee, all I've got to do, if I really want to write, is wait around for some ship in the cold night, and I'll blow out my breath, and I've got my thing."

INTERVIEWER

So this sustained you?

GOYEN

It brought my life back to me. I saw my relationships; it was extraordinary. Lost times come for us in our lives if we're not phony and if we just listen; it hurts, but it's also very joyous and beautiful . . . it's a redemption . . . it's all those things that we try to find and the world seems to be looking for . . . as a matter of fact, that's the *hunger* of the world. So there it was on the ship and it just came to me. I saw so much . . . that I wouldn't have to go home and they wouldn't have to suffocate me; they wouldn't kill me; I'd find other relationships.

INTERVIEWER

So after the war you didn't go home.

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GOYEN

When the war was over, I just dipped into Texas and got my stuff and left and headed towards San Francisco. I had come to love San Francisco when it was the home port for my ship, the aircraft carrier, and I thought that it would be a good place to live. But I passed through Taos, New Mexico, in winter, in February, and I was enchanted. It really was like an Arthurian situation . . . I couldn't leave. It was beautiful and remote, like a Himalayan village, untouched, with this adobe color that was ruby-colored and yellow, all the magical colors of mud. It's not all one color. It's like Rome. Rome looks like that. And the sunlight and the snow . . . just about everyone on foot . . . a few cars . . . high, 7500 feet.

INTERVIEWER

Did the D.H. Lawrence commune in Taos have anything to do with your staying?

GOYEN

I didn't know anything about the Lawrence legend. Had I, I might not have stayed at all. But I did and right away I thought that I'd better get a little more money for myself before I settled in to work. So I got a job as a waiter at a very fashionable inn called Sagebrush Inn. I worked as a waiter for a few months until I met Frieda who came in one night and I waited on her. The whole Lawrence world came to dinner there: Dorothy Brett and Mabel Dodge, Spud Johnson, Tennessee Williams: he was living up at the ranch. They all came to my table. And then the owner of the Inn had to come out and say, this young man is just out of the war and he wants to be a writer. The *worst* thing I wanted said about me; it almost paralyzed me. Well, of course, Tennessee thought, oh, God, who cares about *another* writer. But Frieda said, you must come and have tea with me. She said it right away. I went and from that moment . . . we just hit it off. It was almost a love affair. It was the whole world.

So it wasn't Lawrence that brought me to her; circum-

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A young William Goyen

El Prado, New Mexico; the house of William Goyen

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Kiowa Ranch near Taos; William Goyen, Frieda Lawrence and Dorothy Brett.

Trinity, Texas; William Goyen, his mother and sister.

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stances brought me to Frieda and I found her a great pal and a luminous figure in my life on her own terms.

I would go to teas with her. She would have high teas. In Texas we had a coke. But here it was the first time I met someone who baked bread, you know? She made a cake and brought it out . . . it was wonderful. She wore German clothes, like dirndles, and peasant outfits, and an apron. She was a kitchen frau. A few people came . . . Mabel Dodge had given her this great 300 acre ranch in return for the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers*. That was the exchange. Except she never took *Sons and Lovers* away, so that the manuscript and many others, *Women in Love*, all holograph . . . were there in a little cupboard at the ranch. I could read them and look at them in amazement.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of things did you talk about?

GOYEN

We talked about the simplest things . . . well, really about love, about men and women and about sex, about *physical* living. Of course, I didn't know that I was hearing what Lawrence had heard. Because it was Frieda who gave Lawrence this whole thing and it overwhelmed me.

The various people would come up in the summer and spend time with us, all kinds of people. Just simple people; Indians . . . she was close to Indians. I got very close to three Indians who were really like my family and helped me build my house.

INTERVIEWER

And then people like Tennessee Williams came.

GOYEN

Yes, Tennessee stayed up there with his friend, Frank Merlo. Tennessee told us that he heard Lawrence's voice . . . he was a haunted poor thing, but he did go a little too far.

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D.H. Lawrence was whispering things to him. Suddenly Tennessee had a terrible stomach ache and it turned out that he had a very bad appendix and had to be brought down to Mabel Dodge. Mabel owned the only hospital; built it and owned it. It was like a European town and we were the only Americans, and I went to this hospital to witness Tennessee's dying . . . he was always dying, you know. He was dying in this Catholic hospital screaming four-letter words and all kinds of things with the nuns running around wearing the most enormous habits, most unsanitary for a hospital. Mabel was wringing her hands and saying "He's a genius, he's a genius." The doctor said, "I don't care; he's going to die, he's got gangrene. His appendix has burst. We have to operate at once." Tennessee said, "Not until I make my will." The doctor said, "How long will the will be?" "Well, everything's going to Frankie," so they sat down, with Frank going through an inventory of all Tennessee's possessions. "What about the house in Rome? You left that out." Tennessee was just writhing in pain. So they made a list of all the things. And then they wheeled him off and he indeed had this operation which to everyone's surprise he managed to recover from. Eventually he got out of there. . . .

INTERVIEWER

All this time you were working on *The House of Breath*. How did it get published?

GOYEN

It got published through Stephen Spender, indirectly. He came to that little village where I was living. I had sent a piece of it to *Accent,* a wonderful early magazine; it caused quite a kind of thing. I began to get letters. Random House wrote me a letter and said that they hoped this was "part of a book." (All editors do that I later learned.) They'll say that even if it's just a "letter to the editor" they've seen. That's what editors have to do, God bless them, and I'm glad they

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do. About that time, Spender, a man I scarcely knew, whose *poetry* I scarcely knew, arrived in Taos on a reading tour. A wealthy lady named Helene Wurlitzer of the family who made the organs lived there and brought people into that strange territory to read, and give chamber concerts and so on. I never went to those things because . . . well, I didn't have any shoes; I really was living on mud floors in an adobe house that I had built, utterly primitive, which I loved. I was isolated and terrified with all those things going on in me . . . but I was writing that book. Well, Spender heard that I was there . . . he heard through Frieda who went to the reading, and so then he asked me if he could come to see me; he treated me as though I were an important writer. He had just read that piece in *Accent* and he asked if there was more that he could read. I showed him some other pieces and he sent those around. They were published and then somebody at Random House sent me a contract right away of $250.00 advance for the book, and then promptly was fired. But Spender was very moved by the way I was living there; he wrote a well-known essay called "The Isolation of the American Writer" about my situation there. Nothing would do until Mr. Spender would have me come to London because he thought I was too isolated, too Texan, too hicky. . . . He really took it upon himself to make that kind of decision for me. It was a wonderful thing that he did. The stipulation was that I would bring a girl who had come into my life with me (this blessed girl has passed on among the leaves of autumn) and she was very much a part of my life there in London and together we were real vagabonds, embarrassing everybody—people like Stephen, and Cyril Connolly, and Elizabeth Bowen, Rose Macaulay, I mean, all of them. . . .

INTERVIEWER

You stayed in Spender's house?

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GOYEN

I had a room at the top and Dorothy had a room in the basement, with the stairs between us, creaking stairs. It was an elegant house, an 18th century house in St. John's Wood. At 4:00 tea time in the winter it was dark, and they pulled Florentine-brocaded curtains and turned on lights; it was a time of austerity still, but people came to tea. Veronica Wedgewood would arrive. Dorothy wouldn't come up from the basement. She really hated this kind of thing. She vanished. She just wouldn't participate. So I was really quite alone with this. I guess I must have kept her under wraps. I must have been very bad to her. I don't know. I have to think about that some time. But here they would come: Natasha, Stephen's wife who was a gifted pianist and wanted to be a concert pianist, and so musicians came, and painters. Cyril Connolly was often there because he and Stephen were working together. Dame Edith Sitwell came. We went to her house and she read one night; she sat behind a screen because she wouldn't read facing anyone or a group . . . behind a marvelous Chinese screen and you would hear this voice coming through the screen . . . all those people . . . that was a world that Spender gave me and was a great influence in my life and on my work.

INTERVIEWER

What an extraordinary change.

GOYEN

I was thrown into this elegant surround which was precisely the opposite of what I had been doing. It was right for me because my character, Folner, yearned for elegance. Suddenly my country people were singing out their despair in those great elegant houses. I saw cathedrals for the first time . . . I'd not really seen cathedrals . . . I was able to get to Paris and all around there. All this went into *The House of Breath*. I saw the Sistine Chapel—well, that's the first page of *The House of Breath*, "on the dome of my skull, paradises and

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infernos and annunciations'' and so forth. Europe just put it all right—everything that started in a little town in Texas, you see. It saved the book, I think. Because it made that cry, you know . . . it an *elegant* cry . . . there's nothing better than an elegant cry of despair. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Did people worry what this tremendous change in *venue*—from Taos to Europe—would do to *The House of Breath?*

GOYEN

Some people worried about it. James Laughlin of *New Directions*, when I had published a bit, wrote me, ''You are ruining your work fast; the influences you are coming into are coming too soon, and you're allowing your personality to overwhelm your talent. Obviously people find your *Texas* personality . . .'' (and he could be a snide guy too) ''. . . charming and you might be of interest to them for a little while. But you are writing a very serious book and this will be permanently damaging to your work.'' He really wanted me to get out of there.

INTERVIEWER

Were there other Cassandras about *The House of Breath*?

GOYEN

Well, Auden had kind of looked down his nose at me. He said it's the kind of writing where the next page is more beautiful than the one just read. ''One is just breathless for fear that you're not going to be able to do it,'' he said, ''and that makes me too nervous. I prefer James.''

Christopher Isherwood said, ''You know, my dear boy, you'll never make it. That is what one feels when one reads you. You'll never survive with this kind of sensibility unless you change, get some armor on yourself.'' As a matter of fact, he wrote me and warned me again . . . he put it all down in a letter. And that *did* scare me. I was young and I was scared.

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But I knew that I had no choice. Then that feeling of doom *really* came on me . . . because I had no choice. I knew that I couldn't write any other way.

INTERVIEWER

When you began writing *The House of Breath* did you expect it to be published? Were you writing for publication?

GOYEN

I was most surely not "writing for publication." But I don't think there is any piece of the novel except one that was not published in magazines before the book itself was published.

INTERVIEWER

You said earlier your father was upset by the book when it was published. Had you been concerned about the family and hometown reaction?

GOYEN

Concerned, yes. I fell out of favor with many people in the town, let's put it that way, and just about disinherited by my own family. I had nasty letters, bad letters from home and heart-broken letters from my mother and my father. Generally the attitude was one of hurt and shock. It was not until fifteen years later that I was able to go back to the town! And even then rather snide remarks were made to me by the funeral director and by the head of the bank. We met on the street.

INTERVIEWER

So when you apply for a loan, you won't do it in that town?

GOYEN

No, and I won't die there, either.

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INTERVIEWER

How long did you and the girl stay as Spender's guests in England?

GOYEN

I settled in for the whole year of 1949 . . . and I finished the book in that house at St. John's Wood, in Stephen's house. The girl was there until it got very bad; we had problems and so she moved to Paris; that made me have to go to Paris to see her there and we had this kind of thing that was going on. When I came back, bringing my manuscript on the Queen Mary, she came with me to New York. But then we had one visit with Bob Linscott, my editor, who said to her, "My dear, do you like to eat? Do you like a roof over your head? You'll never have it; he's an artist. I feed him and Random House has kept him alive and probably will have to from now on. Don't marry him, don't even fall in love" . . . and he broke her heart. He really did. Poor Dorothy. He was right; I wasn't about to be saddled down. And so it broke away and that's okay. Many years later I found a woman exactly like her. Her name was Doris and so often I say to Doris, "Dorothy," and I'm in trouble.

INTERVIEWER

That was quite a step for an editor to take. What do you think their particular function should be?

GOYEN

Well, really caring for authors . . . not meddling with what they did but loving them so much and letting them know that he cares. Generally at that point, when you're starting, you feel that nobody does. Linscott looked after you and if you had no money, he gave you money. Once Truman Capote met me at the Oak Room of the Plaza. "I'm embarrassed to sit with you," he said when I sat down, "your suit is terrible." I hadn't really thought about what I was wearing. He said, "I'm not going to have you wear that suit anymore.

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But," he said, "I've ordered drinks for us and if you'll just wait, I'm going to call Bob and tell him that he must buy you a suit that costs at least $250." And he did. Bob gave me money and he told me, "Well I guess he's right." He was lovable, Truman. He did sweet lovely things then.

INTERVIEWER

Carson McCullers was one of Linscott's authors, wasn't she?

GOYEN

I had first known her in this nest that Linscott had up there for these little birdlings of writers. Carson had great vitality and she was quite beautiful in that already decaying way. She was like a fairy. She had the most delicate kind of tinkling, dazzling little way about her . . . like a little star. Like a Christmas, she was like an ornament of a kind. She had no mind and she could make no philosophical statements about anything; she didn't need to. She said far out, wonderfully mad things, that were totally disarming and for a while people would say, "I'll go wherever you go." She'd knock them straight out the window.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of people interested her?

GOYEN

She had a devastating crush on Elizabeth Bowen. She actually got to Bowen's Court: she shambled over there to England and spent a fortnight. I heard from Elizabeth that Carson appeared at dinner the first night in her shorts, tennis shorts; that poor body, you know, in tennis shorts and she came down the stairs; that was her debut. It didn't last long. But that was Carson.

INTERVIEWER

What was distinctive about her stories—as say compared to

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the other Southern "magnolia" writers?

GOYEN

She would try to make her stories scary and the word "haunted" was used of course, by the literary critics, "the haunted domain." I think that was the French title for Truman's first novel . . . *Other Voices, Other Rooms. Les Domaines Hantés.* But Carson was . . . she was a really truly lost, haunted wonder-creature. It's hard to be that and grow old, because of course you either go mad out of what you see, or I guess you try to imitate that kind of purity. She was a bad imitator. So it was just a bore.

INTERVIEWER

She was not a person to have as an enemy.

GOYEN

She was . . . not tough but she had a nasty . . . well, she had a way of absolutely devastating you; the kind that hurt, that little kind of peeping "drop dead" sort of thing. She had an eye for human frailty and would go right to that; that's why people fled her. They thought, who needs this? Why be around her?

Then, of course, she was terribly affected by not being able to write. It was a murderous thing, a death blow, that block. She said she just didn't have anything to write. And really, it was as though she had never written. This happens to writers when there are dead spells. We die sometimes. And it's as though we're in a tomb; it's a death. That's what we all fear, and that's why so many of us become alcoholics or suicides or insane—or just no-good philanderers. It's amazing that we survive, though I think survival in some cases is kind of misgiven and it's a bore. It was written recently about Saul Bellow that one of the best things about him is that he survived, he didn't become an alcoholic, he didn't go mad and so forth. And that the true heroism of him lies simply in his endurance. That's the way we look at artists in America.

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People said to me when I was sixty, "My God, you're one of the ones, how are you. But you look *wonderful.* We didn't know where you were." They thought I was dead, or in an institution or something.

INTERVIEWER

Could her editor Linscott help McCullers at all?

GOYEN

Poor Linscott couldn't get any more out of her and then he died before he could help her. I doubt whether he could have; no one could have. She was hopeless. She was just kind of a little expendable thing, you know? She would stay with me days at a time. I put her to bed; she had a little night-gown. I was playing sort of dolly; I was playing house. I sat with her while her ExLax worked. Two or three chocolate ExLaxes and three wine glasses, and about three Seconal. And I would sit by her bed and see that it all worked, or at least it all got going in her. And then she was off to sleep.

She had some awful cancer of the nerve ends. This caused the strokes and she had a stroke finally on the other side until she was very badly paralyzed and then she had just a massive killing stroke. She was absolute skin and bones. They took her down there to Georgia, not far from where Flannery O'Connor lived, where they buried her.

INTERVIEWER

Could she have written an autobiography?

GOYEN

She did not have "a hold of herself," as a person would say, enough to look back and see herself in situations. She never could have written her autobiography; it would be impossible for her . . . she had disguised herself so much . . . And what a past, you know? Her mother . . . the Mother of *all* these people . . . thank God mine seems to be quite okay—I'd be raving mad at this point. Carson's mother was

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an aggressive lady, all over the place, and she came here once and worked at *Mademoiselle*. She had a notorious time as a fiction editor there. She did the oddest things . . . rejecting stories in her own Georgian way, generally in terms of cooking. I think she wrote to a writer once, "The crust of this story holds its contents well. . . " (She was off on a pie), "but my dear, by the time we get to the custard, it runs." The pie image went on and on. "This pie won't do," she said, ". . . came out of the oven too soon." She was a self-educated lady from the South who very early on had read Katherine Mansfield, for instance, and had told Carson about Mansfield, which was the worst thing she could have done. Once I went with her to meet Carson's plane. When she saw her daughter step out of the plane, she turned to me and said, "I seen the little lamp." I thought, "That's some allusion I'm going to have to find out about." When Carson reached us, she said, "Carson, you know what I told Bill when you appeared?" (She was the kind of lady who would repeat a thing she'd said.) "I told him that I seen the little lamp." Carson burst into tears. I said, "Please tell me what this is that hurts you so." She said, "Well, it's that beautiful story called 'The Doll's House' by Katherine Mansfield. It's the last line of the story. A poor little girl peeks in a garden at a doll's house owned by a snobbish family, and she sees this glowing little lamp inside. Later when the little girl's sister asks why there is a curious glow in her eye, she says, 'I seen the little lamp.' "

INTERVIEWER

What about your own mother?

GOYEN

As a literary person I truly am the offspring of my mother and women like my mother. There's no woman like a Texas woman in her eighties. It's not Southern. She wouldn't have a clue as to what a "Southern lady" was. Hers was a singing way of expressing things, and this I heard so very early that it

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became my own speech; that's the way I write. I love spending money to talk to her on the phone in Texas an hour at a time because it's just as though the curtain that came down on an opera last night goes right up when I call her tonight. The aria goes right on; it's just wonderful.

INTERVIEWER

What do you talk about?

GOYEN

About how Houston has grown, and how she wants to go back to the little town she left fifty years ago. I write her expressions down; I have to do that to understand what they really mean; it's almost another language. But she keeps breeding it. I mean, she's writing all the time. I may not be writing, but she is. She's alive. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Do you carry a notebook with you to put these things in? Or keep a diary?

GOYEN

Oh yes, I always carry paper with me . . . something to write on, always. And I keep not so much a formal diary any longer, but, well, it's a notebook, and in it I keep most things.

INTERVIEWER

What do you do with those ideas that strike you in the middle of Macy's, say, and you can't record them fully or easily? Are they often unrelated to what you currently are writing?

GOYEN

It's rarely unrelated. When one's really engaged deeply in a piece of work, truly writing it, it takes over almost everything else and you find you're thinking about it constantly

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and it's a part of everything that happens. Even the clerk in Macy's suddenly speaks out of the novel that you are writing, it seems, or is a character in it. All the people in the world are suddenly characters in the novel you are writing. Everything contributes. The created piece of work has suddenly replaced what is called real life . . . life as it really is, whatever *that* means . . . so that it's not surprising to have it come at one from all angles.

Therefore, I know that if I've been writing all morning and I've got to buy groceries at noon, I better take paper with me, because I'm going to *keep* writing as I go down the street; you can write on the sack that your groceries come in, and I have!

INTERVIEWER

What about the six years you were an editor at McGraw-Hill? Were you able to write, or did this interfere with your work?

GOYEN

The whole McGraw-Hill period is one that I want to write about. I have been writing about it in my *Memoirs* (my next book). The writer in the world of publishing, and particularly *me* in the world of publishing, who had been so disillusioned and embittered by publishers. . . .

INTERVIEWER

You were disillusioned with your own publishers?

GOYEN

Not my own *per se*. Just publishing in general—the making of books and the life of the making of books. All these things seemed so dead-end to me, without meaning. In this great place, this huge publishing house, I was a special person, in that I was a special editor. I was brought there to concern myself with serious writers and with new writers and what would be called Good Books, "quality writing." I was so concerned with the writing of my own authors that I

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considered their books my own and I treated them as such. I entered into their creative process. Nevertheless, I was caught in the competitive crush and thrust of commercial publishing. There was no question of my own writing. I was relieved not to have to worry about my own writing. I scarcely grieved it, or mourned it. It had brought me so little—no more than itself.

I suddenly was not a man who I had known. I was on the phone . . . I hate phones, I really can't manage phones well. I won't answer it generally and if I do I can't talk very long; I just can't do it. But here I was having to live and negotiate on the phone. Editors live that way. With agents and all that. . . . Here I was doing this for the first two or three years. I was drawing up contracts and I never knew what a contract was; I didn't know what they were about.

But I began to fail after the fourth year. I got very disturbed for all kinds of reasons . . . publishing, that's a corrupt thing sometimes. I had my way for a while but then pretty soon night must fall and I was back with the old budgets and best-selling books and a lot of crap.

INTERVIEWER

I take it your interest in your own writing increased during those six years?

GOYEN

Yes, that was bound to happen. As years passed, I began to be hungry and I wasn't quite sure what that hunger was. Well, of course, it was that I was not writing, and the more I exhausted myself with other writers, the more hungry I became to do my own work. This is an exhausting thing, being an editor, and I had no time left for my own work, no matter how much I wanted it. The demands made on me were almost unbearable. And that was when I left McGraw-Hill—or was asked to do so by Albert Leventhal.

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INTERVIEWER

That was in the '60s. In the '50s you were teaching at The New School. Did you find teaching just as demanding? Or was this a more satisfactory way to earn an income while doing your own writing?

GOYEN

Teaching writing is draining too, of course. Especially the way I do it. You see, I believe that everybody can write. And in believing and teaching this, what happens, of course, is enormous productivity on the part of many students. One's students produce so much that he is followed down the street by the mass of stuff he's encouraged! I mean, he's overtaken by it. And there's that much more work to do and more conferences to hold, and it's a depleting and exhausting thing. Just as exhausting as editing.

INTERVIEWER

Is there an ideal occupation for the writer, then? Other than teaching?

GOYEN

Probably teaching is ideal. Because there's a community of writers there, and because the writer is respected and understood as a writer in colleges now. He's brought there as a writer, so it's understood why he's behaving the way he does and what he's doing when he's not around; he's *expected* to write. It's well-paid, now, too—universities are paying writers well. It's probably the best. It takes a lot of discipline for a writer to teach writing, though. But in the end, leading writing seminars and workshops is refreshing and exhilarating and creative and in touch with life. I consider teaching one of my callings.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of your students?

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GOYEN

The young people I've been involved with in my classes seem to have no sense of place. It bewildered me at first and then it caused me no little alarm. We've talked about it and what they tell me is often what I've presumed . . . that there isn't much of a place where they come from. I mean, every place looks like every other place. Even suburban places—around here or in Ohio or wherever—all look alike . . . a shopping center, a McDonalds, the bank with the frosted globes on the facade, you know, that's a given building. The repertory theatres all look alike. So that they really don't have a sense of place except through literature. But when they begin to write they can't write about Flaubert's place. So what they're writing about right now is the Princeton campus, and I've told them I don't want to hear about that. I ask them, but didn't you live somewhere before? Wasn't there a room somewhere, a house? A street? A tree? Can't you remember?

There was always a sense of belonging to a place in my childhood. The place. We called the house "the place." "Let's go back to the place," we'd say. I loved that. There was such a strong sense of family and generation and ancestors in it. It was like a monument . . . that's what my impression was and I wrote about it as that. It was a Parthenon to me . . . with that enduring monumentality to it. But these students . . . they've had terrible family problems—they are dissociated . . . they're so disoriented . . . divorce, my God, divorce is a way of life in these generations. I ask them, don't you have a grandmother? Do you ever go to your grandmother's? Where does she live? Oh, they say, she lives with us; or she lives in an apartment; she lives in the condominium. These elegant old ladies, they don't live in places anymore, either.

INTERVIEWER

To get back to your own work, do you feel that music is reflected in your writings?

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GOYEN

It's an absolute, basic part of my work, there's no question, and I think of my writing as music, often; and of my stories as little songs.

INTERVIEWER

"Little songs," of course, is the literal meaning of the word "sonnet." The Albondocani Press has just published an edition of your early poems, poems written before your first novel. What made you abandon poetry for fiction? Faulkner said that all short story writers are failed poets. Do you feel this is so?

GOYEN

I think an awful lot of them are. I'm not a failed poet, I'm just a poet who made another choice, at a certain point, very early. Actually I'm so taken by the dramatic form I'm really a playwright manqué! I still consider myself, after having written and seen produced four plays in the professional theatre, manqué in the theatre. And yet I continue to love the form and fear it more than love it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your playwriting has been beneficial to your fiction writing?

GOYEN

I think it has. I think it's made me care more about writing fiction, for one thing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel a compromise in the collaborations between director and producer and writer?

GOYEN

No, no, that's welcome to me, all that. I need all the help I can get! I never accept playwriting as a solitary thing.

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Once you do, you're ruined: because from the beginning it's a collaborative affair, and the sooner you can get it on to a stage, the better. The more you write at the table on a play, alone, the farther away you're going to get from the play. So far as the theatre is concerned, it becomes a *literary* work the more you work on it. But writing for the theatre has made me understand plot. It's helped me with plot in fiction writing.

INTERVIEWER

What European authors and what American authors have meant the most to you?

GOYEN

As for American authors, Hawthorne and Melville have meant a great deal. And Henry James. And two poets—Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot—have influenced me.

INTERVIEWER

In what ways? They seem odd choices for a Southwestern fiction writer. . . .

GOYEN

I still read, I still study, the *Cantos* of Pound. I found Pound in Texas when I was eighteen or nineteen through a young friend named William Hart. Hart was one of those prodigies, *enfants terribles*, that materialize in small towns, young men bearing a sense of art and poetry and life as naturally as others bore the instinct to compete and to copulate. He had a great deal to do with my early enlightenment and spiritual salvation in a lower middle class environment in an isolated (then) Texas town, where a boy's father considered him a sissy if he played the piano, as I've said, and questioned the sexual orientation of any youth who read poetry.

William Hart was a true pioneer; he brought me Pound, Eliot, and Auden. He was self-taught, finding things for himself out of hunger. He had a high-school education,

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barely, but afterwards he came and sat in my classes at Rice and listened. He knew more than the professors did sometimes—he really did . . . about Elizabethan drama, and medieval romances. He knew these things. He was a delicate boy, obviously, but not effete. He was French Cajun, from a poor family, and he was on the streets, and could have been in trouble a lot. But he ended up in the library. They felt they had a revolutionary in there. In the Houston Public Library at nineteen he would get up and speak about literature, and Archibald MacLeish, of all people. And oh, how this man Hart spoke. The whole library would turn and listen. He became that kind of town creature, one of those who go down in cities, unheralded . . . they go down into beds of ashes. Well, he brought me Pound.

Pound's *Cantos* hold for me madness and beauty, darkness and mystery, pain, heartbreak, nostalgia. Some of the most beautiful and most haunting were written as a prisoner. He made, above all, *songs*, and he told his stories lyrically, as I have felt driven to tell mine. By ordinary speech, ordinary people. I mean that it seems to me that Pound sometimes speaks from a sort of sub-tone in his poems like a con-man, a back-street hustler, using pieces of several languages, bits of myth, literary quotations and mixed dialects and plain beguiling nonsense. There is a stream, flowing and broken, of *voices* in Pound, echoes, town speech, songs, that deeply brought to me my own predicament, in the home of my parents and in the town where I lived. He helped show me a way to sing about it—it was, as most influences have been for me, as much a *tone*, a sound, a quality, as anything else.

The same for T.S. Eliot. He seemed then so much more American than Pound—but then Pound has the Chinese calligraphy and the heavy Greek and Latin. Eliot's wan songs broken suddenly by a crude word or a street phrase directly influenced me as a way to tell *The House of Breath*; and doom cut through by caprice shocked me and helped me survive in my own place until I could escape; showed me a way of managing the powerful life that I felt tearing through

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me, and trying to kill me. I saw a way: "Cry, what shall I cry?"—the dark Biblical overtone of the great poem; "the voice of one calling Stetson!" Oh, Eliot got hold of me at that early age and helped me speak for my own place.

The story-telling method of Eliot and Pound—darting, elliptical, circular, repetitive, lyric, self-revealing, simple speech within grand cadence and hyperbole, educated me and showed me a way to be taken out of my place, away from my obsessing relations: saved me from locality, from "regionalism." I knew then that it was "style" that would save me. I saw Pound as the most elegant of poets and the most elemental. Both. His madness partakes of both (elegance and elementalness) and is a quality of his poetry: "Hast 'ou seen the rose in the steel dust / (or swansdown ever?) / so light is the urging, so ordered the dark / petals of iron / we who have passed over Lethe." That's Canto 74, from the *Pisan Cantos*.

INTERVIEWER

What of the Europeans?

GOYEN

Balzac above all, if just for the sheer fullness of story in him, for the life-giving detail in his novels. The daily *stuff* and the *fact* of his writing helped me struggle against a tendency toward the ornate and fantastical and abstract. Then come Flaubert, Proust. Of the English, Milton—a curious choice, right? The minor poems of Milton, but *Paradise Lost* above all. Milton's richness and grandness—his *scope*. I had an *epic* sense of my story, my material, and he helped me see it. Then Dante—the *Inferno*. Heine's poems—their sweet-sadness. The beautiful lyric poems of Goethe. Thomas Mann's stories, especially "Disorder and Early Sorrow," and *Buddenbrooks*. And some of the lyrical poems of Wordsworth. Poetry has been a strong influence on me, you see. I read it as often as fiction.

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INTERVIEWER

You weren't influenced by Faulkner in any way?

GOYEN

No, not at all. His work is monumental, and extremely important to me, but not in any way an influence. It goes along beside me—*Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom*—but not through me. I can't say why, but I know that that's true. Maybe he's too *Southern*. If that is a tradition . . . I'm not part of that. Thank God for my southwestern-ness . . . that Texan thing. My father, I'm afraid, is a Southerner, a Mississippian, but my mother and her family for generations were native Texas people . . . so that was a strong influence. I knew a lot of my father's family; they're the people I've really written about in *The House of Breath*. But something kept me away from those sicknesses and terrors that come from that Deep South.

INTERVIEWER

The House of Breath came out at the same time as other celebrated works—Styron's, Capote's, Mailer's. Did you feel part of a writing generation?

GOYEN

I felt immensely apart. And most certainly did not belong to any "writing generation." I remember, indeed, saying,in an interview with Harvey Breit in 1950 in the *New York Times*, that I felt excited about joining the company of those writers, but that I had not before that time been aware of any of them! I stayed off to myself. I read nothing of "the literary world" when writing *The House of Breath*.

INTERVIEWER

Subsequently, did you ever do any reviews of your contemporaries?

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GOYEN

I reviewed *Breakfast at Tiffanys* for the New York Times Book Review. Actually it was a fair review. . . but it was critical. . . I called Capote a valentine maker and said I thought he was the last of the valentine makers. Well, this just seemed to shake his life for the longest time.

INTERVIEWER

Do your contemporaries interest you now?

GOYEN

They really don't interest me very much. I still feel apart and, well, I *am* apart from my contemporaries. And they don't know what to *do* about me, or they ignore me. I am led to believe they ignore me.

INTERVIEWER

Hasn't that perhaps something to do with your books having been out of print for a decade or more, until recently?

GOYEN

No, I don't think so. How could it? My books have been in libraries, on reading lists in universities. Somebody was always writing a thesis or a paper on my work and writing to me for my help.

But: if I am so full of the books of all these people—Doris Lessing and John Updike and X and Y and Z—how will I have a clear head for anything of my *own?* I'm really not very interested in contemporary fiction, anyway. I consider my fiction absolutely separate and apart from and unrelated to "contemporary American fiction."

INTERVIEWER

You feel closer to the European literary tradition?

GOYEN

I do.

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INTERVIEWER

Your books continued to remain in print in European editions long after they were unavailable here. Do you have any notion why that is?

GOYEN

No, unless it was because my books were translated by such eminent translators—Ernst Robert Curtius and Elizabeth Schnack in Germany, Maurice Edgar Coindreau in France.

INTERVIEWER

All your novels have a rather unique form: they do not follow a linear line, for one thing. Did *The House of Breath* ever take form as a straightforward narrative and then later get broken down into monologues?

GOYEN

No, no, no. The form of that novel is the way it was written. It was slow, although it poured from me and a whole lot of it was simply *given* to me, absolutely put into my mouth. There were great stretches when nothing came. Then it poured out. . . in pieces, if that's possible. So, I thought of it as fragments. . . that was what established its form. I once called it *Cries Down a Well,* and then I called it *Six Elegies.* Later it was *Six American Portraits.* So it came in pieces, but I knew that they were linked.

INTERVIEWER

What do you have against the linear novel?

GOYEN

I always *intend* to write a linear novel when I begin. It's my greatest ambition to write a straightforward novel, and I always feel that I am, you know. I get very close. I thought *Come, the Restorer* was very close to being a linear novel. Then people laughed at me when I finished and said that's not true at all.

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INTERVIEWER

What people?

GOYEN

Friends or interviewers, I suppose. What I end up writing each time, you see, is a kind of opera. It's a series of arias and the form is musical, despite myself, and it is lyrical. The outcry is lyrical despite myself. These novels have come to me at their height, passages have come to me in exaltation. So that the gaps between have been my problem and the—I was going to say—*quieter*. . . spaces and moments. . . but I don't mean that, because there are *many* quiet spaces in these books. But the less *intense* spaces seem to be hard for me to manage, somehow. What seems meant for me to do is always to begin what's called the linear novel, and try and try and try. . .

INTERVIEWER

Going back to form: Do you think of the novel as a lot of short stories, or as one big story? Or does it depend upon the novel?

GOYEN

It might. But it seems to me that the unified novel, the organic entity that we call a novel, is a series of parts. How could it not be? I generally make the parts the way you make those individual medallions that go into quilts. All separate and as perfect as I can make them, but knowing that my quilt becomes a whole when I have finished the parts. It is the *design* that's the hardest. Sometimes it takes me a long time to see, or discover, what the parts are to form or make.

INTERVIEWER

Does the completion of one "medallion" lead to another?

GOYEN

No, the completion of one medallion does not usually lead

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to another. They seem to generate, or materialize, out of themselves and are self-sufficient, not coupled to, or, often, even related to, any other piece. That seems to be what my writing job is: to discover this relationship of parts. Madness, of course, comes from not being able to discover any connection, any relationship at all! And the most disastrous thing that can happen is to *make up,* to *fake,* connections. In a beautiful quilt it looks like the medallions really grow out of one another, organic, the way petals and leaves grow. The problem, then, is to graft the living pieces to one another so that they finally become a living whole. That is the way I've had to work, whatever it means.

INTERVIEWER

Have you made medallions that did not fit into the final quilt?

GOYEN

There's rarely been anything left over, that is, medallions that didn't fit into the final quilt. If the pieces didn't all come together, the whole failed. It's really as though all the pieces were around, hidden, waiting to be discovered, and there were just enough for the design on hand. If, in rare cases, something was left over, one tried to use it as some sort of preamble or "postlude"—that sort of fussy thing. It never worked, even when one felt it was such "fine" writing that it should be kept in. It's this kind of exhibitionism of bad taste that's harmed some good work by good writers.

INTERVIEWER

So you started writing under a quilt and you came out producing quilts.

GOYEN

Producing them is right.

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INTERVIEWER

How else would you describe your own writing, or your style?

GOYEN

As a king of singing. I don't say this because others have said it. But we've spoken of my work as song, earlier, the musicality of my writing and its form. It's impossible for me not to write that way. I write in cadence—that could be very bad. Just as in the theatre, when an actor in rehearsal discovers that lines in a speech rhyme, he or the director is horrified. Someone in the back of the theatre will scream out, "Couplet! Couplet!", meaning, "It rhymes! It rhymes!"

Now, when I speak of writing in cadence, I obviously don't mean "Couplet! Couplet!" Nor am I concerned with alliteration or any kind of fancy language. But I am concerned with the *flow* of language (the influence of Proust). I think of my writing as having to do with singing people: people singing of their lives, generally, arias. The song is the human experience that attracts me and moves me to write.

INTERVIEWER

Are you concentrating now on short stories or novels?

GOYEN

I have less an urge to write the short story, and more of a concern with writing The Book. It has nothing to do with anything but my own lack of a need for the very short form and a deep love for the book itself, for a longer piece of writing.

INTERVIEWER

Some may say you achieved both in *Ghost and Flesh*—a book of short stories which, on rereading, seems a total book rather than a collection of pieces. Was it conceived as a book, or was it a true gathering?

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GOYEN

No, it was conceived as a book, it truly was. A sort of song-cycle, really, that made up a single, unified work, a thematic unity like Schubert's *Die Winterreise* (which influenced *The House of Breath*—an early Marian Anderson recording. Frieda Lawrence first made it known to me, that is, the poem on which the songs were based).

Ghost and Flesh . . . you can see in those stories . . . wow . . . quite surreal and I loved those, and when that was finished and published, I kind of went off the beam. I think the book made me quite mad; writing it, the obsession of that book; but, on the other hand, *The House of Breath* did not. And that's an obsessed book, you see. It's hard to say these things but something always pulled me through. Of course my critics might say, he *should* have gone mad.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of madness was it?

GOYEN

While I wasn't that sane, I knew that madness—that's the word I use but I don't know if it's quite right—that dangerous thing. . . that terror, and I knew that. I guess I knew when to let it alone.

It comes in a loss of reality. If we say madness that sounds funny. But let's say an other-worldness. It has to do with identity. I go through phases of not knowing my own history. It's amnesiac almost. I've knwn this all my life; as a child I've known that. The loss of the sense of the world around me, of the reality. It means that I just have to isolate myself and then I'm okay.

Also, I found a very strong wife. So my choices must have been blessed. God knows, when I brought her home to Texas, people gathered to meet her and congratulate us and one woman came over to me who had known me all my life and said, "My God, I can't tell you how relieved we all are. We thought you were going to bring home some *poetess!*"

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INTERVIEWER

Is writing a work of non-fiction markedly different for you from writing fiction? Did you derive equal satisfaction from reconstructing the life of Jesus (in *A Book of Jesus*) as you do composing a novel?

GOYEN

Oh, yes. The excitement was tremendous in writing that book. There was no difference in feeling between that and what I felt when I had written fiction. It was as though I were creating a character in this man. A marvelous experience. Astonishing. A very real man began to live with me, of flesh and blood. He did the same work on me that He did on the people of the New Testament that He walked among: He won me over, enchanted and captured me, finally possessed me. I went rather crazy with the love from Him that I felt. I carried a little New Testament around with me in my pocket and would flip it open and read what He said, at cocktail parties or at dinner tables. A surprising reaction from my listeners generally followed: they were struck by the simplicity, wit and beauty of what the man said to others, particularly to the wonderful woman at the well.

INTERVIEWER

How do you react to the charges of being a regional writer?

GOYEN

For me, environment is all. Place—as I was saying about my students—is absolutely essential. I know the vogue for the non-place, the placeless place, á la Beckett, is very much an influence on writing these days. It has been said that places don't exist anymore. That everything looks alike. There is the same Howard Johnson on your turnpike in Kansas as there is in Miami and in the state of Washington. And the same kind of architecture dominates the new office buildings and the skyscraper. What is a writer to do? Free the "reality" of his

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environment? To lament loss of place, to search for it in memory? Because within place is culture, style. We speak of a lost way of life. In many of my books and stories, I've felt the need to re-create, to restore lost ways, lost places, lost styles of living.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't this what Marietta did in *In a Farther Country?* And what was expected of Mr. De Persia, in *Come, the Restorer?*

GOYEN

Exactly. So to this extent, then, I *am* a regional writer: In that my writing begins by being of a region, of a real place. It begins with real people talking like people from that place, and looking like them. Very often regional reality ends there and these people become other people, and this place becomes another place. The tiny town of Charity, in *The House of Breath,* is really Trinity, Texas, truly, accurately described. Once described, however, it ceases to be Charity or Trinity and becomes. . . well, London or Rome. The pasture in front of the house in Charity where a cow named Roma grazed becomes the Elysian Fields, and Orpheus and Eurydice flee across it. The house itself becomes a kind of Parthenon, with friezes of ancient kin.

I think there are moments when I exceed myself as a human being, and become Ulysses, perhaps, or Zeus. It is the point of time at which the human exceeds himself, is transformed beyond himself, that I most care about writing about. This is the lyrical, the apocalyptic, the visionary, the fantastic, the symbolic, the metaphorical, the transfiguratory, transfigurational—all those terms which have been applied to my work.

Now, by "exceeding myself as a human being" I mean in *life*—epiphany moments in life—not in *writing.* I mean those moments when human beings experience an epiphany, a transfiguration (that's the word) are the moments that most excite me. I've seen it in supreme artists who sang or danced

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or acted, in people who've told me they loved me, in those whose souls have suddenly been reborn before my eyes. These are moments and people I most care about writing about, no matter how small the moment, how humble the person. "I seen the little lamp," the transfigured child said at the end of the Katherine Mansfield story.

INTERVIEWER

Are your closest friends writers? Is talking to other writers helpful or harmful to your work?

GOYEN

My closest friends are theatre people. Painters were once closest to me. For some years I lived among painters. But that changed. Now it's either performers or directors. I love theatre people, they give me a great deal. I don't particularly like writers, and I am not prone to talk about writing. Since they're solitary workers, writers tend to *act out* in public, I believe. They seem to carry more hostility maybe because they are responsible to more people (their characters), to a whole world—like God—than painters or actors. Maybe it's because writers are caught in the English language, which sometimes seems like a sticky web you can't pull your antennae out of, like insects I've watched in webs, and are, in public and when they're with other people, still thrashing about in an invisible web. It is *enraging* to work in words, sometimes; no wonder writers are often nervous and crazy: paint seems to be a more benevolent, a more soothing and serene-making medium.

Musicians always want to play for you, which is wonderful and wordless; painters seem to want to talk only about sex or point out to you the hidden genital configurations in their canvas! Since the writer is truly a seminal person (he spits out his own web, as Yeats said, and then, as I just said, gets caught in it), the truly creative writer, I mean, he's full of the fear and the pride that a maker of *new* things feels. So it's seemed to me.

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INTERVIEWER

After one of your books is done, do you divorce yourself from the characters, or do you seem somehow to maintain a contact with them?

GOYEN

Oh, the characters in my first novel haunt me to this day! Actually *haunt* me. And characters like Oil King (from *Come, the Restorer*) who's been in my life a long, long time. I've lived with him and loved him and written about him for many, many years. They stay with me, yes indeed they do. They stay. They not only enter my life but I begin to see them in life, here, there. I see Marietta McGee quite frequently, in several cities. I had not dreamt she was down in Enseñada, Mexico, until recently when I was there. They seem absolutely to exist in life, when I've seen some of them transferred to the stage: like Oil King in *The Diamond Rattler*—it's as though they read for the part and got it—read for their own role. And Swimma Starnes crops up a lot.

INTERVIEWER

How much of a plan do you have before you begin a novel or a play?

GOYEN

I plan quite a bit. But I'm not too aware of it. That is, I've not got it all down, but I've got a good deal of it thought through or *felt* through, before I begin writing. So that the whole world of it is very much alive and urgent for me. I'm surrounded by it—almost like a saturating scent. I feel it like a heat. The world that I'm going to write has already been created, somehow, in physical sensation before I go about writing it, shaping it, organizing it. My writing begins physically, in *flesh* ways. The writing process, for me, is the business of taking it *from* the flesh state into the spiritual, the letter, the Word.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you see, from *The House of Breath* to your latest novel, a progression? Do you see any new directions forthcoming?

GOYEN

There *is* a progression. I'm much freer. And I see a liberation of certain obsessive concerns in my work, a liberation towards joy! I feel that I'm much freer to talk about certain aspects of human relationships than I once was. . . . What was the other question?

INTERVIEWER

Do you see any new directions in your subjects or forms?

GOYEN

That's very hard to say. I'd find that only as I write on. I *do* want very much to write a heavily-plotted novel, a melodramatic novel.

INTERVIEWER

Finally, a last question: Why do you write?

GOYEN

And the easiest to answer! I can't imagine *not* writing. Writing simply is a way of life for me. The older I get, the more a way of life it is. At the beginning, it was totally a way of life excluding everything else. Now it's gathered to it marriage and children and other responsibilities. But still, it is simply a way of life before all other ways, a way to observe the world and to move through life, among human beings, and to record it all above all and to shape it, to give it sense, and to express something of myself in it. Writing is something I cannot imagine living without, nor scarcely would want to. Not to live daily as a writing person is inconceivable to me.

—ROBERT PHILLIPS

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Seven *Romances*

Ira Sadoff

The Romance of the Rose

I could not help myself, I fell in love with the florist. Each day he handed me arrangements of flowers: lilies-of-the-valley, chrysanthemums and roses, exotic willows and violets. As a lover he was strange and melancholy: he had an intense hatred for the out-of-doors and almost never left the house; the mention of sports made him dizzy and a car moving too fast would bring him close to tears. He was deathly afraid of heights and he was not homosexual. When he found me talking to another man he brought me a wreath and said he would leave me, though he did not. In the winter, though, it was I who could not leave my bed: my robe seemed to grow roots on the sheets and I made him bring me my meals on a tray. When he threatened to leave I became the carnation in his lapel, I was his brooch. When the weather became warm and clear, somehow it was he who wrapped me in a blanket, dragged me outside to a park; and when we made love I was the one who wilted, I felt my color brush off on his chin. And when he took me home for the last time, I could not help but stare at the limp stems of flowers, the discolored water, the fragrance of my own immobility, the fear that all this could happen again, and when it did, nothing would blossom, nothing would spoil.

The Romance of the Racer

The race car driver was different. He made love with all his clothes on. Always the smell of grease, a trailing vapor of

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gasoline. He drove circles around me and when it was over I was tired and dizzy, his tongue in my mouth was a memory, a thin slice of dirt road. When he spoke he was like an engine idling, he could never talk fast enough; but whatever he said was unexpected. "I enjoy being sad," he once told me. "I wish there were more sadness in the world." In bed he was not much of a man, once was always enough.

He was an insomniac who read long books and never said a word about them. He took me to the opera and asked me not to raise my voice. He hummed arias he said had not been written yet. Once he took me to a party where all his former lovers were, and they never stopped talking about him. Two of them he still made love to on big occasions: the night before a race, the afternoon of Verdi's birthday. And when he took me home he was unusually cautious, driving way below the speed limit, stopping at intersections where he had the right of way. When he got into bed he curled up like a wheel; in the dark I could have sworn he was spinning. In the end, what he had to prove he could not, and we all loved him the more for it, at least for a short while. When I drove out of his driveway for the last time I did not look back; but on the road I had the feeling I was constantly being passed, no matter how fast I went, no matter how many cars were filled with whistling men.

The Romance of the Regiment

The general was always giving orders: clean up this mess, have your hair done this way, let me enter from the rear. He had an intense dislike for insects, clumps of dirt, anything small. His hatred of long hair extended only to men: he wanted his women to have hair that would run all the way down their backs, the way a river would divide a battlefield. He'd spend whole nights stroking my hair and whistling military tunes, even if the only thoughts that crossed his mind

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were the next day's maneuvers, which medals he should pin on his chest. He was reluctant to perform his marital duty, with his wife, with me, or with anyone else.

He went to sleep with his boots off, perfectly erect, his hands at his sides, his feet pointing upward toward heaven like a dead man. He did not love war, and he never struck me in the face, in moments of passion or otherwise. He would do anything for his men short of an act of mercy.

With the general I always ate the best of food, wore gorgeous clothes and rode in limousines. We took short trips to Venezuela to meet the oil magnates, and all his friends called me his paramour. He forbade me to use vulgar language and always made me wear a dress. In public he was attentive and mildly affectionate: always with a kiss on the back of the neck, his arm entwined with mine. Sadly, it was all a camouflage; to be perfectly frank, the general was stiff when he should have been soft and vice-versa.

The Romance of the Evening

I remember the night I fell in love with the evening. I was driving on a mountain road, a few moments after dusk: the trees' shadows were merging with the background of the sky, the cool air was a whisper in my ear. I did not abandon myself uncontrollably, I did not lose sight of the road. Rather the evening surrounded me the way a footprint surrounds a foot, the way a star is surrounded by empty space. I lost the notion of preference: I did not care for darkness over light, I could not tell my left hand from my right. Later I drove through the forest knocking down small trees; rabbits were caught frozen in my headlights, the car's engine gave off the smell of fear: fear released, fear repulsed, fear returning. I got out of the car in a small clearing and turned off the lights. The evening made no demands; I did not have to remove my clothes, there were no promises made or broken. I did not

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have to give up my other lovers, nor did the idea of fidelity even occur to me: no matter how many times I left the evening it would always come back to me, by choice or otherwise.

The Romance of the Rorschach

The psychiatrist was the dullest, the man with the least imagination. For days we'd look at his strange inkblots, he became angry when I did not see what he saw, when I confused an elephant's head with a child lost in fog. We made love on Tuesdays, on the condition we did not speak. Always one hour exactly, never more and never less. I never saw his couch and he always liked to be on top.

When I told him about the other men I had known, at first he blushed, then he asked me why I felt this desperate need for men, what was so wrong with spending nights all by myself? When I asked if he were jealous he huffed out of the room and only later simpered back; he insisted he was the psychiatrist, it was he who knew what was best for me. But perhaps I'd have to find this out for myself. To punish me he said he saw no need to see me for awhile, now was the time to test what we'd discussed. For weeks after that he'd call me on the phone, ask me if I were all right, then he'd tell me all his problems, how he found it difficult to rise in the morning, how he no longer desired his wife.

Our affair did not end because I found him with another woman: he was the one man I was sure of, he held no power over me. Rather, when I was tired of all his questions, when I said my love of words was limited, he told me my time was up. I went down the elevator without regret, touching everything I could get my hands on: other men, the walls of tall buildings, the lips of a glass. And if I never gave him another thought, if I never had to share the air he breathed, it would still be too soon, I'd never share my nightmares again.

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Romance of the Real World

I decided to give up on the world of metaphor: I would become the rose itself. The world would not exceed its own dimensions, nothing would be more or less than it seemed. The streets were deserted and no one would speak to me; luncheonettes were left with their doors open, their half empty saucers and plates. It was always cloudy out and the cold, gray air hung over the city like a cloud of smoke, a drawn-up net. If someone struck a match, the hiss would be heard for miles. If a dress were unzipped, it could set a child on edge.

At first I took everything at face value: I believed the promises of politicians, the husband who happened to come home late. I forgot the nuances between women, the open window of the penthouse looking over the river. I could see everything but I could not touch. If I were prepared to register a feeling, it was without approximation. When a drop of rain reached up from my roots it was like . . . when the sun went down the air was somewhat different: scientists like to call it photosynthesis, but what is that like? And if I speculated on my own death, the moment of my wilting, I would be like the mute actor whose words had failed him once again.

Yes, my frustrations were too numerous to mention: in someone's lapel I smelled pastries rising from the bakery, how would I communicate that? Growing wild in the country, listening to the varieties of weather, there were endless trails of animals who stood above me, who blocked my view. Always my petals seemed like an enormous ear: I could not help but hear what was going on around me. There were teenagers on a small park bench, acting out a movie they must have seen: "Is it too soon to tell our parents?" "You'll never leave me, will you?" "My intentions are the best." Out of boredom I had to hum myself a tune: an aria of Handel's, a ballad about the agitation of water, the changing seasons, the soft powder of snow.

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O the flat world could hold nothing of me, it was like water without the glass. I knew I had to return to the world of metaphor, my own domain: to the flower's fragrant desires, the dangerous thorns of the stem, the petal's opening lips. And I would lose my passion for daily life, its vague and helpless watering, its withering speech and slowly spreading weeds. I would save my kiss for the pollination of the dream-life, the windless orchard, the landscape which would not end.

The Romance of the Remainder

At last I've fallen in love with endings. I've begun to dream of being the last woman on earth—by some miracle, disaster or divine plan, only men have survived the holocaust. To satisfy themselves, they had to seek me out. At first I found it thrilling, I slept with anyone, the youngest first and then the strongest. But suddenly I had more power than I was accustomed to, I had too much to choose from. To keep my composure I had to get away from myself. If I sat in a chair a man's hand would be underneath it. If I decided to take a shower a man would be peering from behind the curtain. I covered myself the best I could, I never accepted favors from anyone; I opened doors for myself, I lifted heavy objects from room to room.

The world was not a desert as you might expect; far from it. When the smoke cleared the foliage was lush, there were weeds growing out of the concrete. I found a million ways to enjoy myself. Empty buildings and staircases spoke to me alone; I communed with the empty cars, or the women slumped over the steering wheels. My temperament shortly became less extreme, I never wept or raised my voice: I was like the surveyor's plumb in the middle of a valley. I walked into movie houses and empty screens became my mirrors. When it snowed over the dead bodies and piles of rubble, it

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was as though the old world had been erased, smeared off-white or slightly gray. And if the end of the world was near, then the beginning of something else I did not yet understand would soon begin. In the distance I hear someone playing music on a comb. Two tin cans and a drum. Someone small is lying down with someone else. Like it or not, as though we had a choice, we'll love to survive, we'll refuse anything that refuses to move.

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A Ticklish Situation

Then there is the question, how to disrobe for swimming? For if a girl simply strips naked, she is immodest. If she takes off some clothes but leaves on others, she is still undressing, still immodest, her body motions sure to spawn lewd thoughts, as for instance seeing a mother walking with her child suggests nights of abandoned passion.

And is it any better to arrive pre-dressed in swim clothes, or to swim dressed in "street" clothes? Does not the one show too much skin, and the other show the strong desire not to show skin, which calls up visions of vast expanses of the most intimate skin?

And is not the mere refusal or disinclination to swim on a warm, sunny day, suggestive of a wish to hide, of feelings of guilt and shame, which bring to mind those body parts with which guilt and shame are associated?

There can be but one solution. To undress without undressing, to swim without swimming—in the manner of one who, hearing sparrows chirping in the cherry tree outside his window, watches and enjoys them, at the same time not hearing, watching, or enjoying them at all.

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Every time you walk into your apartment

there's a stink somewhere. One day the cat has sprayed your bookcase. Or the sewer's backed up. Or the Thai woman downstairs is cooking rancid fish.

Your bedroom smells like gym shoes. You suspect your brother's kid of puking on the stairs.

Commercial deodorants smell worse than what they cover up; so you try incense. The thick, sweet smell is a relief at first. But what's that underneath? Spoiled hamburger?

Nowadays when you come home, the first thing you do is sniff. You're constantly apologizing.

You'd like to think the smells are minute traces, magnified by your finely-tuned perception. But when you ask, people say no, they're clearly there.

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The Visiting Distinguished, *or* Do Your Own Weeping

Because you are the Visiting Distinguished, and because our whole city is celebrating your illustrious *Treatise On Weeping*, I am giving a party in your honor and discussing with you some prominent instances of weeping I myself have observed in men's rooms, offices, train stations, etc. My other guests are waiting to join the discussion; let them wait.

But suddenly a giddy girl invades our conversation and says to you "But Sir, don't you think we should just get together, you know, and do our own weeping? I mean, I loved your *Treatise*, it was so exhaustive and insightful and all, but wouldn't you like to come with me to the bedroom so we can see how it would be to weep together?"

When he comes back they are both weeping, he blubbering over her—"My baby kidnapped!" and she bewailing over him—"My aged daddy in ruins!" My conversation with him is, obviously, shattered. And as soon as everyone else hears them, they all begin to weep over each other—"Your ebbing funds!" "O God the taxes on your angst!" and I find myself weeping over them all—"O alas, waly waly, oi weh!" and wiping my eyes on my copy of his *Treatise*, that I had hoped he would autograph for me.

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The Recollection-Hole

The middle-aged man decides to cut a hole in his breakfast table, to stick his finger in and so carry around with him that table, his breakfast-recollection.

But never a hole in his lunch table or his supper table, he cautions himself. Moderation!

When next breakfast time comes, the hole has grown, so that his knife and fork and bacon and toast are falling through the hole, the yolk of his egg bending So-Long. He reaches after them all, but not too fast!, he cautions himself. Always moderation!

But suddenly hunger, the immoderate lust for breakfast-recollections, seizes him and throws his hands down the hole, then his elbows-shoulders-head—too fast!—down past his breakfast-recollection, down past his last-night's-sleep-recollection, down past his youth-recollection, down past his life-recollection-even-before-birth. O the sorrow of insufficient moderation! says somebody's recollection of the middle-aged man before it too begins to pour down the hole, bending So-Long.

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Three Poems by Philip Graham

Railroad Man

Not until I learned how to transform my childhood dreams into tomorrow's crust of bread did I become truly successful at begging. Now I'm able to pick and choose, and there are only a few select areas I'll work. Of primary importance is the presence of an electrical outlet. After finding one there's at least a half hour of preparation behind the dilapidated cardboard screen I carry with me everywhere. Then, the last few touches: setting the trains properly down on the tracks and plugging the cord into the wall socket which, with my head on the ground, is only a foot or so away. Finally, I kick away (though gently) the cardboard facade with a shout of ALL ABOARD!, revealing myself as the living landscape over which my H.O. trains run.

Of course a crowd quickly gathers to watch the appearance and disappearance of the train on the tracks that runs in and out of the holes of my raggy clothes. They see the bulge move up my pants leg, they hear that train whistle coming round the bend of my knee, they see the engine emerge through the tear of my dismal corduroy into the clear city air! The train now veers off my abdomen onto the sidewalk by my rib cage, heading on a collision course for my distended arm, which I lift at the last minute and lower as the caboose passes by. At the same instant I lift my head above the engine that was about to enter my ear. The crowd (much larger now than when the train began on the piece of track balanced between the loose soles of my shoes and my stinking socks) applauds. Some even throw coins to where, perched on my chest, is a half-filled, miniature water tower, embossed with the legend "Make A Wish."

The drama continues and heightens: after it careens up and over my other arm and onto my belly, the train lurches right and left as I go into a coughing fit. I get ticklish from when the train enters my pants pocket, and shake with laughter until it brushes past my ankles. The engine speeds up. I

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sing "Casey Jones" in a mournful minor mode which causes people to stick around to see if I'll lift my head in the knick of time again. But I've already quickly readjusted everything and now I'm holding the tracks between my teeth, yodeling the theme from "The Bridge Over The River Kwai," and of course there's a beautiful effect as the train cars pass above, much like the way light filters through a picket fence, or the way individual frames repeat upon each other when the film slows down.

I improvise continually until the coins piling in the water tank threaten the water with overflowing, and the overflowing water threatens me with electrocution. I pull the cord from the outlet with my teeth—a great effect since I wait until the train is right under my head. Then I rest back on the pavement while the train slows down, and announce "Last stop, Beggar's Unshaven Chin, population 1 and growing older every day. Next departure, fifty minutes."

Applause, cheers, whistles, even "Woo-woo's" like a locomotive in the distance. The crowd disperses . . . I carefully take the tank off of my chest, gently untangle myself from the tracks, raise back up the cardboard screen, and then I begin to count my money which now, under water, looks so much larger.

Toe

After months of crippled absence we were going to be back together again: you had given up Disappearing Cream, I had given up cold cuts. And as I waited for your train and your face that I could barely remember, I passed the time in my favorite way, a catalogue of body parts. Head? Here! And then the sub-divisions: Mouth? Here! Nose? Here! and so on. Then, Left arm? Here! Thumb? and continuing on quietly to myself until soon I had no idea I was asleep on the station bench. My body became, you might say, the stuff of dreams,

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I was the very air that I was sitting in. I spread out until I was sitting everywhere in the station and the crowds of people, rushing to their own destinations, walked through me and woke me up in time to hear a voice announce the arrival of your train.

Well when I stood up the first thing that struck me was that I was missing a toe. The itching in the empty space was unbearable, and persistent in a way that my toe had never been before its absence. I spent at least a half hour looking for it and when I finally remembered your arrival I looked for you too, but you were nowhere to be found.

There was nothing for me to do but return home, and I half feared that too would be gone.

Unknown to me, my toe was still dreaming.

It dreamed its nail was a clear pool, a mirror about to be overwhelmed by flesh.

It dreamed it was a young sprout, taking root in a foot.

It dreamed its deepest, most passionate dream: that it was part of a fist.

My toe became less mine, because its own dreams, its transparency toe-like only by virtue of the three invisible hairs on its little knuckle and the equally invisible lint clinging to its base, a reminder of when it was among companions.

It dreams of not only its portion of the ground, but everyone's. Then not just the ground, but all the space just above it. Then not just a thin horizontal, though all-encompassing slice of air, but all air. Then not just all air, but nestled under a bench in the station, someone spills coffee on it.

Days have passed, and I'm still not used to the wind whistling in my socks. I can be made out, even from a distance, with my minute limp. I've become an Eskimo with an unequal team of huskies, and without a landmark to be seen I barely realize I'm slowly being pulled off course, so that before arriving where I intended, I'm home again.

And you, you still write to me with passion, with no return address. Yes, I too believe every hill is a successful stone, and that each kiss develops into the evening mountain range; I

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also believe that opening the refrigerator is a political act, in fact, *any* change of temperature: we've gone through all this before. And even though I'm very impressed with the multiplication tables you send me, what do I do with my corrections, and how can I tell you these calculations aren't necessary in order to memorize my phone number?

One night in my chair I feel a whimpering. I understand my toe has finally awakened from its dreams and it's surely still back at the station, chasing after all the shoes that pass by on the floor, searching for me.

I have to return. Just as I shut the door behind me, the phone rings. And I know it's you. That's right, the phone rings. Then silence, and my remaining toes petition me for needed haste. The phone rings. In the silence my toe pinkies wail over a larger toe they're almost too small to remember. The phone rings, silence, and my toe knuckles pucker their joints to kiss my socks into rubbing my shoes further on down the road. The phone rings sounding more and more like your voice too long unheard, while at the same time my shoe-laces unravel themselves into a noose around my ankles, while above it all I've finally made a decision, sighing over this limp that I'm going to have to learn to live with.

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Letter From The Magician

I continue my unsuccessful career as magician. It isn't so much that I giggle whenever I substitute cards, or that the secret pockets in my jacket keep jiggling. These are the effects of a larger cause: my nerves are shot because *I'm actually becoming a magician.* Things seem to occur through me, effortlessly, and I don't need to practice or prepare. All my old sleights, all my tricks have become superfluous, and yet they're *all I know.*

Because of this, I've become hugely popular: the audience loves the way the magic occurs and the illusion's complete in spite of all my outward sham. But sometimes the balance erupts, horribly. Example: in trying to pull a rabbit out of my hat, I somehow pulled it out of my shoe, and in the confusion it strangled in the laces. My mirrors no longer conceal. Instead, they expose everything, even down to the pimples, crow's feet and gray hairs of my assistant. Even my part time work (never a source of pride), selling ersatz medicine in the fringe towns on weekends, is affected. Now the stuff actually works!

Complications have set in, and perhaps will be my final downfall. Three months ago I indeed sawed my assistant in half. Let me be clear: I *tried* to saw her in half, hoping that, from recent developments, if no trickery was intended, trickery would then result. But my magic had improved to the point where I needed masquerade to mask its power. And its power is such that even she was fooled, and didn't start screaming until it was all over. In trying to turn myself in, all I managed to do was cause the evidence to disappear. Yet retribution, like my power, isn't predictable: last month, in

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front of a large audience, I pulled a dead, and therefore stiff, rabbit out of my zipper, and was arrested on exposure charges.

Events continue to draw to their close, which I'm sure is me. I couldn't stand life in a cell, and with an elaborate Houdini trick involving *three* large traveling chests, bedsheets, an inner tube coated with butter, and the mongrel dog that had barked at me through the iron bars for weeks, I managed to escape, effortlessly, to another prison. And no one has even noticed! Please, send me, as soon as you can, to the above address, a cake. *Just a cake:* I'll supply the saw.

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Tom Weigel

The Commissioner's House

The new Commissioner was free to choose a dwelling which suited his fancy. If it did not exist, it would be built for him at public expense. But when he asked for a pagoda, he was given a geodesic dome. His original request specified an elevator. Instead, they constructed only an exposed shaft. Perhaps this was done to compromise his whims, thought the Commissioner. The kitchen was a significant alteration from the plans he had submitted. In place of the gas range drawn for the center of the floor, he received a hot-plate on a counter severely reduced in size. The living room rose to the full height of the dome. Barcelona chairs and contemporary-styled coffee tables of glass and chrome composed the only furniture in the airy space where the floor was of grey quarry tile. Nowhere did he find a trace of the rococo pieces he had ordered. The master bedroom could not be distinguished from the other five. Also, he had acquired three more bedrooms than planned.

Times were tight, the Commissioner reasoned. He would not let such details prevent him from moving into his bubble-shaped castle. So the first thing he resolved to do was try out the bathroom. It surprised him that the door required a push. He missed the presence of a door handle. Once inside, the aged and stoic Commissioner had to catch his breath. He faced no less than seven urinals. On the opposite wall was a full-length mirror, under which were three sinks made of quality travertine. The sinks helped alleviate the Commissioner's impulse toward irritation, but their beauty could not allay the next fact. He counted five commodes, each set in a stall of its own. His eyes began to ache under the fluorescent

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lighting. Which one would he use? Suddenly, as quickly as the question had been raised, that decision was made for him. A blond man emerged naked from behind the rear wall, where, the Commissioner surmised, lay the shower. The man introduced himself as the Commissioner's valet. He invited the excited Commissioner to try the commode nearest the shower. With conscious deference to rank, the valet motioned with a sweep of a hand, to which the Commissioner entered the stall. The valet followed after him. While he did not get his pagoda, the Commissioner mused, he was determined to enjoy his new environment.

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The Age of Art

Charles Newman

No joke, Tyler and Travis now have separate bedrooms. No problem, you would think, as there are four nice ones available. Still the smallest in the family, 124 retains the least large room, the one with the radiator which flakes toxic lead paint and the ridiculous closet space. Tyler, taller, uses the Master one, the king-sized mattress with the blood stains, and the French wallpaper stippled with blue paisley. An octagonal bay gives out on the yard, his prerogative. Travis has bought herself a cannonball bed with an extra-firm mattress for her slight curvature of the spine, as well as an Empire campaign desk and dresser ensemble. The peasant curtains clash with the pointillist wallpaper, but what the hell, it's Travis's first private room since she was nine. She has even more magazines now than then.

The remaining room has been designated an office/guest room taxwriteoff. But there will be no guests for a while. Since their crisis, these two are on bad terms with their respective families and friends. And that is somehow more

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painful than their own estrangement; a perfect word, Tyler notes. Tyler and Travis are both 32 now, and this is the first shared crisis of their ten year marriage, through which 124 has been with them from the beginning. They know that there will be other crises, probably at 44 and 57, the first related to Tyler's career, the second to Travis's glands, and of course, it will also be difficult when 124 goes. But this foreknowledge, which they know makes their species unique, does not suffice.

Their friends speculate about this attractive couple, universally admired for both their refusal to offer advice or confess a thing. The diagnoses fall short of the mark. Travis refuses to see a shrink because she knows she is smarter than they are, and Tyler openly concurs with this. With oblique masculinity, he assumes that he is the cause of her problem and must bear with it. One thing, though, is that Tyler, once quite competitive, all elbows and knees, has come to love practically everyone quite fiercely, except Travis, while Travis, once so open and charming, a real credit, has begun to moon and bark. She even accuses Tyler of fucking on the side, which he wishes were true, and thus cannot convincingly refute.

With Tyler, it isn't a question of starting over. He's seen too many trade in their '48 Plymouths for '49 DeSotos. He's not mad *about* anyone else. He's no longer even mad *at* Travis. Even when, like the other night, she lay groveling, sobbing, at the bottom of the stairs while Tyler drank in the taxwriteoff, grinding his teeth, thinking that as long as he wasn't going to leave Travis, he'd be damned if he'd have to go downstairs. Their friends felt sorry for Travis feeling so sorry for herself, and sorry for Tyler because he was not permitted to feel sorry for himself.

Tyler's trees were in trouble too. Tyler owned two of the largest elms in Elm City, trees more than 400 years old. In the summer, they threw a canopy over the entire lot. In the winter they held tons of snow in their massive crotches. Tyler could sit in the taxwriteoff and watch them for hours. Those anaconda limbs dwarfed even the pink sun as it slid through

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them. And at sunset, Tyler would always do some figuring; let's see, the sun's 2,000,000,000, the trees are 400, the country's 197, the state, uh, 102, the town 50 some, we're 32, 124 will be 10 in March, and the cannonball bed is about 1 week now . . . Dutch Elm was savaging Elm City.

Travis despised the trees in particular, though in general she knew that Elm City wouldn't be the same without them. She had seen pictures of neighboring towns after the chestnut blight, real nice respectable towns like Elm City which suddenly looked as common without the trees as some Nebraska burg. But Travis hated the way the trees hung over the house . . . if even a small limb should fall . . . ? The roots pressed against the basement walls causing them to sweat; they slurped up water and fertilizer that was meant for the mock-orange, no grass or garden would grow beneath them, and the few seedlings that Travis managed to start in the interstices of sunlight the limbs permitted were soon trampled by 124 and his friends. Pansy, hibiscus, rose of Sharon which when Travis's mother grew them were as large as softballs split at the seams after lying in a rainy outfield for a month, were unknown here, and even the miracle shrub which the catalog said would be resplendent with immense white flowerlets all summer, luscious purple berries in the fall, colorful red bark in the winter, and cream and lime variegated foliage to fool the spring forsythia, never legally died but took no notice of the seasons. "Bloom," boomed Tyler, "bloom you bastards!" A lot he knew. The poppies he said he ordered never arrived.

What had arrived was the Arborist. Tyler cringed in the taxwriteoff with 124. Travis met the man civilly at the door but made him wait outside. Then she knocked on Tyler's door. "Jesus, Tyler," she said, "the Arborist's southern. His name is Fondue Reedy, or something like that."

Tyler finished his beer, and after a limp handshake took the Arborist out to the trees. He seemed quite soft for a treeman, a moo of a red face and bell bottomed denims. Over his

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left army shirt pocket was a faded rectangle where his military name had been.

Tyler hugged the largest of the elms, his long thin arms reaching not even a quarter of the circumference, wedging his loafers between the roots.

"You think it's got it?"

Fondue stared upward where Tyler was pointing; a large lower branch with a lemony hue.

"Iff'n it don't, it's a pretty good imitation."

"We've had a cold summer . . . " Tyler began hopelessly.

"Iff'n it don't come down by me, the city'll take it. Just a matter of time. Suit up yerself."

"Have you seen any elms this big in town?" Tyler stalled.

"Not standin'."

Tyler peered at the man.

"You want some recommendations, Mister?"

"No . . . no," Tyler was distracted. "Well, how much to take them down?"

"One grand per gentleman."

"God, isn't that an awful lot?"

"I'm not gonna wampus around up in that gentleman for the love of it, Mister."

"Well, I didn't expect . . . "

"Hold yer taters, Mister. You know what I got to do? I got to top that gentleman if it don't flip my ass across this county. Then I got to drop it so it don't fall on your garage or on that power line. Then I got to cut the son-of-a-bitch up into two, three foot pieces, then I got to truck 'em fifty miles to the burnin' place, then I got to bring that truck back empty. We all got problems. I'd only do for you what I'd do for myself."

"There's no way to save them?"

"Yeah, there's some stuff. I injected 100 trees with it in Tennessee. But it ain't been governmint tested yet. It's a hunch, that's all."

"How much for that?"

"Five taters per diameter inch. No guarantee."

"What do you think, though?"

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"Wal, a grand's worth 1100, mister."

"All right, Mr. Reedy, let's take a good swing at the pitch." And Tyler shook hands and turned rapidly for the house.

"In the mornin' iff'n it don't rain."

As soon as the Arborist had left, Tyler looked outside to check the yellowness. It seemed to have spread an inch or so since Fondue Reedy had left, and if he couldn't arrest it, the City Inspector would spot it for sure. They had taken down all the elms along the parkway only 3 blocks from Tyler in the last week. He looked at the trails and favorite hiding places 124 had made in the privet hedge, and then he glanced up at Travis's room where the shades were down. Tyler picked up the newspaper which was so wet that it disintegrated in his hands. 124 charged by him and into the house where he threw himself mewling on the sofa. A sudden short peace descended on Tyler which made him very itchy.

Travis had been watching Tyler in her housecoat from the small slits made with cuticle scissors in the shades of her new own room. Beyond him, she could see the neighbor lady, Ricki, already at work in her new Spanish Provincial kitchen. The neighbors, Ricki and Franklin, were Travis and Tyler's best friends. Franklin worked with Tyler at the office, where they respected one another. Until recently, Travis and Ricki had talked about everything and shared their problems. Once Ricki had even taken Travis to a group where they were to "act out their problems," but despite a good deal of crying and kissing and hugging, it depressed Travis more than not. Just as Tyler felt responsible for his failure with Travis, Travis felt responsible for her inability to respond to the group. Ricki had perhaps compounded the problem by suggesting in the group that Travis's problem might be her relationship with 124. "He obeys me, but he won't play with me," Travis explained. The group suspected Travis was not telling the whole truth, that if she were more honest with herself, and open with them, that she might be able to put things in

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perspective. "But I *am* being honest and open," she insisted. "Tyler doesn't love me as much as I want him to. What could be more honest or open than that? . . . " One of the women began to stroke her soothingly. "Please," whimpered Travis, "don't . . . maybe I just need something better than the truth."

Later on, Ricki suggested that it might be fun if the two couples all had sex together. "You can love more than one person," she said.

"Maybe," said Travis, "but what if they all don't love you?"

"We all love each other, don't we?" Ricki said.

When Travis asked Tyler about this, he was of the opinion that it would complicate his relationship with Franklin. "I need a good accountant more than I need to get laid," he said. Travis agreed for once.

To tell the truth, Tyler had had sex with Ricki once, a long time ago. He had been weeding under her kitchen window (before its Iberian refurbishing) having begged off golf with Franklin, and Ricki had invited him in for some coffee. Ricki had no furniture in her living room then except enormous vinyl-covered beanbags. She lay down on one, and asked Tyler if he wanted to have sex. Before they did, Ricki put on a pair of earphones and turned the stereo up. Tyler wondered what she was listening to, and envied Franklin out there duffing around.

Afterwards, Tyler went back home and urinated, spattering the toilet seat and shag rug. Later in the taxwriteoff, he could hear Travis muttering "pig, pig," as she cleaned up after him.

Later that evening, after taking his turn putting 124 to bed and having a few drinks, Tyler knocked on Travis's door to say goodnight and gave her the summary of a TV show that he had digested intermittently between chores.

"There were these three couples, you see, and the emcee

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sends the wives out and tells the husbands to draw pictures of their wives in their most *characteristic* activities. They give them easels, and one does his wife on the phone, another does her washing and drying, and the third one, I think, was taking a nap. None of the wives when they came back on stage could guess which drawing was of her. Of course, they weren't very good drawings. How do you think I would draw you, Travis, what would you be doing?''

Travis didn't answer directly but gave Tyler a summary of the evening news. Verisimilitude she had perhaps, but her sadness lacked something.

Fondue Reedy arrived just before noon. 124 toddled out to greet him but cowered when he saw the unnameable tools. Fondue had brought his clubcab pickup with two 500 gallon drums and two silent, surly helpers of rusticated mountain origin. These two began to drill holes in the ground at the perimeter of the front elm's drip line, while Fondue began to pump the contents of the two drums into the holes. Then Fondue jerked himself up the trunk with a lineman's belt and boot spikes. Just below the primary crotch, he drilled into the trunk and inserted two pipes, which even before he descended began to drip an opaque froth.

''What's the idea here?'' Tyler asked.

''Ain't no fact of the matter, mister, just something in my head. When somethin's goin' to bad, you use what medercine you got.''

''It doesn't sound very scientific,'' Tyler said.

''The wife wants me to get out of this line of work,'' Fondue replied.

Then he looked up into the great web of branches, feigning an admiring squint. ''Can't get m'belt around her,'' Fondue went on, ''she's so wide around, and you know what, mister, she gets thicker as she goes. I never hardly saw a tree like that.'' Then he grinned for the first time. ''Sure would like to have a woman like that.''

The comparison puzzled Tyler. ''I don't see why . . . '' he began.

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Fondue turned quickly. And Tyler could see that below the soft face, Fondue's neck cords were as thick as his fingers. And that his fingers had the texture and diameter of seaman's rope. In fact, Fondue was the only man Tyler ever saw whose forearms were larger than his biceps and calves, and whose trapezius, thumbs, wrists, dick and ears appeared of equal weight.

"Say," Fondue said softly, slowly, neckcords still pulsating, "when I was up in that there tree, I saw a lady lookin' at me from the winder. Is that your wife anyway?"

"Of course."

"Boy oh boy. You sure got yourself a pill there. A real lemon . . ."

Tyler was so taken aback that absolutely nothing occurred to him, even astonishment. But Fondue had already turned away, and dropping his useless safety belt to the ground, began again to climb the elm, chainsaw dangling from a cord about his waist.

As many times as Tyler had stared up into that tree he had not absorbed its enormity, until he saw Fondue dwarfed in its crown. The Arborist moved gingerly towards the diseased limb, jerked the saw into a whine, and the yellowness shuddered just before the limb crashed with tremendous force into the lawn. Tyler cursed in delayed action; he saw the leaves crackle where Fondue was and then an odd flash of light. The two helpers were staring open-mouthed, rubbernecked; Tyler could hear 124 running in nervous circles behind him. Then Tyler saw the chainsaw hurtling in the sunlight, but even before it disappeared into the privet hedge, he was aware of Fondue's crumpled body on the sidewalk not five feet from him.

The scream of the chain saw assumed a more human tone as the two helpers ran for the truck. Tyler stared incredulously as they peeled away, though it was true that incredulity always seemed to relax Tyler. He stepped over Fondue's body, strangely unbloody, reminding Tyler somehow of a documentary he had once seen on hunting in Manitoba. The

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chainsaw had ceased its chattering in the privet, and Tyler regarded the severed limb, its yellowness now more menacing than ever, sunken in the lime green turf. And then glancing up, he saw Travis's face impassive at the window of her room. Her long black hair was spread over her shoulders where she had brushed it, and in her right hand she held an oval hand mirror. Tyler carried a trembling 124 into the house, propped him up in an easy chair, wiped his nose and eyes, and after a few soothing words, turned on the Auburn-Missouri game.

After the police and doctors and reporters and lawyers had milled around the front yard for a while, Tyler came out on the front steps to answer any questions, which weren't all that tough. Travis gave 124 his dinner and put him away for a nap. Their friends, the neighbors, were there, Franklin staring puzzled at the corpse, and when Travis suddenly appeared on the front porch in a dashing matador pantsuit, Ricki embraced her, and Travis began to weep and shake. When the men turned Fondue over, everybody looked up into the elm, many perhaps for the first time in their lives, far more than just a glance, except one man who was entranced with the torn end of the fallen limb. He touched it, smelled of it, and then walked slowly to each of the large trees, marking them 823 and 824 respectively with an aerosol paint can.

Ricki was huggermuggering Travis. Tyler stood up straight and felt his underchin unfold. Ricki took Travis home to listen to some stereo.

A week later, Tyler got a notice from Elm City Hall that he had two weeks to get the two elms down or they'd slap a tax lien on him, and take them down themselves in the public interest.

On the pretext of saving his marriage, Tyler arranged for a Caribbean vacation.

The air approach to the island was disappointing. A green puddle in a blue slough. As they disembarked from their aircraft, Tyler and Travis sported identical white linen suits

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and madras ties, matching attaché case and sling bag in Moroccan leather. Ricki had offered to take care of 124. The island was ovarian with karete type waves on one side and a hotel strip on the smooth and tepid lee.

Travis loved the sun and the change of routine, and took long afternoon naps in a hammock, the first time she had slept in the day since she was nine. A quick tan brought out the beauty of her bones, but as much as Tyler enjoyed Travis's new health, he was never more bored.

"The Iowa of oceans," he grumbled into the flat wavelets which lapped into the lagoon whenever Tyler looked up. There were no sunsets, much less nothing to frame them. At 5:50 every day, the red sun fell quite suddenly into the sea like a spangle into dishwater. Floating facedown with his disgusting snorkle, Tyler traded glares with the jellyfish and coralbunnies, wondering if *regarding* them was the point.

The fishing was ridiculously straightforward; you simply threw some barracuda bait from a boat and five minutes later horse in an enormous grouper or something of the sort and watched the natives hit it on the head with an oar. Tyler took his laps in the saltwater pool where he could at least count how far he swam. One day, he swam out to a small classy yacht anchored in the lagoon, and was welcomed aboard by the owners, a retired plastics executive and his kind wife, who explained to him the joys of the simple life. Looking around the tiny galley with all the instrumentation, Tyler was once again incredulous—driving that thing around the ocean would be like commuting to work in a VW in the midst of a truck convoy, while watching a test pattern on TV, and listening to officer Bob with the weather report over and over. If that was retirement, he thought, if that was the simple life, he'd rather work until he toppled over at his desk with thundering apoplexy.

Even the predictable soporific climate gave Tyler no solace; indeed, the entire *idea* of the equator struck him as absurd. It reminded him of having sex with Ricki with earphones in the beanbag. He'd rather have Travis snoring softly through

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the wall, their vast silences over dinner, than the whole damn archipelago.

Worst of all, Tyler was taller than any tree on the entire island. And when he looked out on the horizon and saw a tanker, all he could think of was how his house would look without the trees when they got back: just like that tanker, a stupid rectangle in a larger prison of air.

The one thing Tyler *did* like was lying on his back in the sand—not the actual warmth and certainly not the leisure which gave so much life to Travis, but simply the illuminated tissue of his eyelids, a nightwatch in daylight, blood pumping through the fine capillaries, bacteria slobbering discreetly in his retinas.

If Travis was in her element, Tyler was already converting it to energy. The only way he could deal with it.

They accompany their matching outfits to dinner, the first to act on the gong struck by an uncompromising Mayan. The natives think *they* are handsome; *they* think the natives beautiful. And the word is passed, on both sides; "behave." Tyler's hand, reaching for a cornchip to do the dip into pummeled avocado, is gray beneath the mosquito warding lights. "My hand," he thinks, "is not actually gray."

Through mutual admiration, they are given the best table at the edge of the parapet where the lagoon and the angelfish slop just six feet below. Travis x's their window on a picture postcard of the hotel to send to Ricki. *Fabulous*, she writes in a bold script, *even the old fart seems to like it.* Tyler has received a letter from his lawyer saying that the trees will be down within the week, and appears that Fondue Reedy was not bonded, so Tyler is being sued for half a million dollars by his wife in Tennessee.

Tyler wonders about the trees. Whether they will leave stumps upon which he can leave at least some bird seed, and he shortdreams that one of the trees will fall on their home so he can collect insurance and move to a treehouse. But then, after the first daiquiri, he realizes there is no escaping Dutch

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Elm, on the North American continent. And he recalls reading of a new hybrid poplar which grows five to eight feet in a year and calculates he will be 52 before it is even half the height of his lost elms.

It's hurricane season, we're told, only Tyler and Travis and a convention of roller bearing salesmen, enormous men who apologize often for carrying on, who amaze the natives with touch football on the beach before cocktails. Fun-loving, homesick men who wolf their venison, wild turkey, tuna, artichokes and enchiladas, after smiting each other with heavy forearms, flinging a ball in the shape of this ancestral island, and engagingly, shyly, ask Tyler's permission to dance with the only lady, Travis, and she is fantastic, no doubt about it, the mariachi band with saxophone is all Mayan giggles, as each of a dozen men take their turn with Travis on the floor, their heavy sandy hands on her bare midriff, so polite they break your heart. She hardly has time to eat her dinner, and Tyler refuses to dance, he hates dancing in fact, along with movies, cards and night clubs. On leave from a particularly dramatic rhumba, Travis asks Tyler why he's got his head in his hands. Jealous? she adds.

"I'm just sorry I don't give you what you want," he says. "And I can't imagine why you want it."

"You've always done everything for me but really love me, Tyler."

Not a bad track record, Tyler thinks to himself.

"I've never had a better time in my life," Travis says, "I could stay here forever."

Tyler withstands the obvious.

"What I hate most of all," he says, "is that we have begun to treat each other like everyone else does."

Travis gives him a devastating but genuinely affecting smile. She has regained her youth somehow; the sand, the tan, her eyelids still pale from the sunglasses, glow like plankton from her thermal face. Her lips are frosty, and the nice Indian boy who brings their chiles rellenos can't keep from

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staring. It is now a question of which one of the diners is nuts. Travis has a sinking feeling, a suspicion, that it might not be her.

"You always put things in such a negative way," she begins. "What's wrong now?"

"It just seems, Travis, that you are getting smaller; smaller and smaller."

"I'm sorry, Tyler. I guess in a way I'm just a mess."

"A tiny mess then."

"*You* are like an animal. I don't know what kind. Or rather a lot of different animals, a pack of bears, maybe, in one cage." Then she begins to weep softly, her turquoise pendant shivers in her cleavage. "Maybe I've got sunstroke," she says.

"You were born with bloody sunstroke, Travis."

A conventioneer wedged behind Tyler to the railing, and flung a tortilla into the floodlit lagoon. Orange blunt lipless mouths rose to scarify the surface. "Here's some Mexican meatloaf for ya, fishies."

Travis excuses herself, taking her napkin with her. Tyler moves to the bar among the chorusing, pummeling salesmen. It takes 15 minutes to explain to the crestfallen waiter why they didn't finish dinner. "Hot," says Tyler lying, sticking out and pointing to his stippled tongue, and the Indian performs the "this no popsicle country" shrug.

Travis walked down to the beach before the other hotels, clenching her fists, regaining control in the soft night. At the end of the beach is a coral promontory and a cross gouged into the pocked rock. "A gallant diver," the inscription read, "Jesus Jesus was lost here." The path wandered off to a swamp. Travis turned around and walked back past the hotels where everyone was eating. Just before she entered the hotel, however, in a bar of moonlight between the stunted palms, she saw a couple, at least 25 years older than she and Tyler, holding hands, the woman kissing the man's shoulder as he kissed her forehead. Travis burst into tears and ran up to her room.

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Tyler lurched in an hour later after a medley of college favorites.

I'll eat the veg-a-tables
You eat da meat, etc.

Travis was lying face down on the bed, half naked, a water tumbler full of crushed cigarettes spiraling a blameless aureole of menthol about her body. The paleness where the bra strap was contrasted nicely with the dark racing stripe between her buttocks. "Don't slam the door," Travis said into the pillow, "please don't kick the chairs. Why do you get in these moods?"

Tyler lay down on his back with Travis and slipped off his shoes and socks. Then she undid his zipper but couldn't get the slacks over his numb hips. "I was never very good at this," she said softly.

It was the first time they had been in the same bed for four months. Tyler stared at the two pairs of feet, one up, ladylike, the other's arches hooked down over the edge of the bed, fish and fowl. Then he turned on his back to take his own pants off.

"There's a fly, Tyler. It's driving me bats."

Tyler got up and turned out the light. "When he goes to the light in the john, we'll lock him in."

"I miss 124," said Travis, sobbing.

"Shit, I miss 823 and 824!"

"Tyler, isn't there any way we could make a living down here?"

"Do you realize, love, that my little toe is almost the same length as my big toe? That is rare . . . "

Travis's foot was beneath Tyler's thigh. "The foot is indeed the noblest of beasts," he thought, "smarter than the stomach, more erotic than the brain." Tyler grinned at his unspoken pretentiousness, and began absent-mindedly to knead Travis's delicate browned foot as he would squeeze the roe from a trout. Gradually, effortlessly, Travis's toes assumed their own space, then flexed as they raked Tyler's thighs, whose toes were now definitely dancing, down and out.

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In the morning, Tyler and Travis went out on their balcony in their lemon short-sleeved knee-length Caribbean pajamas. Beneath them in a clump of yucca and hibiscus a large lizard had already swallowed the legs of a tropical quail, but the bird was, almost reflectively it seemed, battering the lizard's skull to a pulp.

"I'm the bird," Travis said, "and you're the snakething, Tyler."

"Nope," Tyler smiled. "I'm the little birdie with the big bill."

"Look, they've stopped," Travis said.

"Let's get dressed," Tyler said, spanking Travis playfully. "I hear there's some great art down in the valley."

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Details of "Winter"

Cletus Johnson

Cletus Johnson has been making theatre constructions for ten years. He was drawn to the "shadow box" format—usually consigned to natural history museum dioramas—by its unique and suggestive possibilities. The medium's closeness to the aesthetics of carpentry and craft were also attractive to Johnson who is interested in folk art woodcutters. His theatres are shallow box-like constructions with just enough real architectural elements to, at first glance, have credibility as "real" architecture. They are painted a matte grey or brown, generally, with sober ornamentation that recalls late nineteenth century neo-classical style. A second look reveals some curious details: doorways that lead nowhere, a doorway that simply leans against the building as if waiting for the otherwise meticulous architect to find a place for it. A lone cow stands perched on a ledge of one facade with an air of belonging. Such incongruous elements co-exist in utter harmony.

The enchantment is deepened by a gentle light that emanates from within and can be controlled by a rheostat. The ability to alter the light stems from the artist's desire to effect the sense of time passing. The physical details of the piece also evoke the sensation of gentle flux, evanescence.

"Winter," reproduced here, is the first of a series of four constructions with a seasonal motif. It is one of the more complex of Johnson's theatres, with three rheostats and nearly 140 lights. The construction is approximately four feet tall; to give a sense of perspective the artist himself is discernable learning against is work in the last photograph. The photographs wee taken by Jack Mitchell in collaboration with the artist. In the photographs, the pair attempted an intimate examination of the piece, scanning the work as one might at an exhibition.

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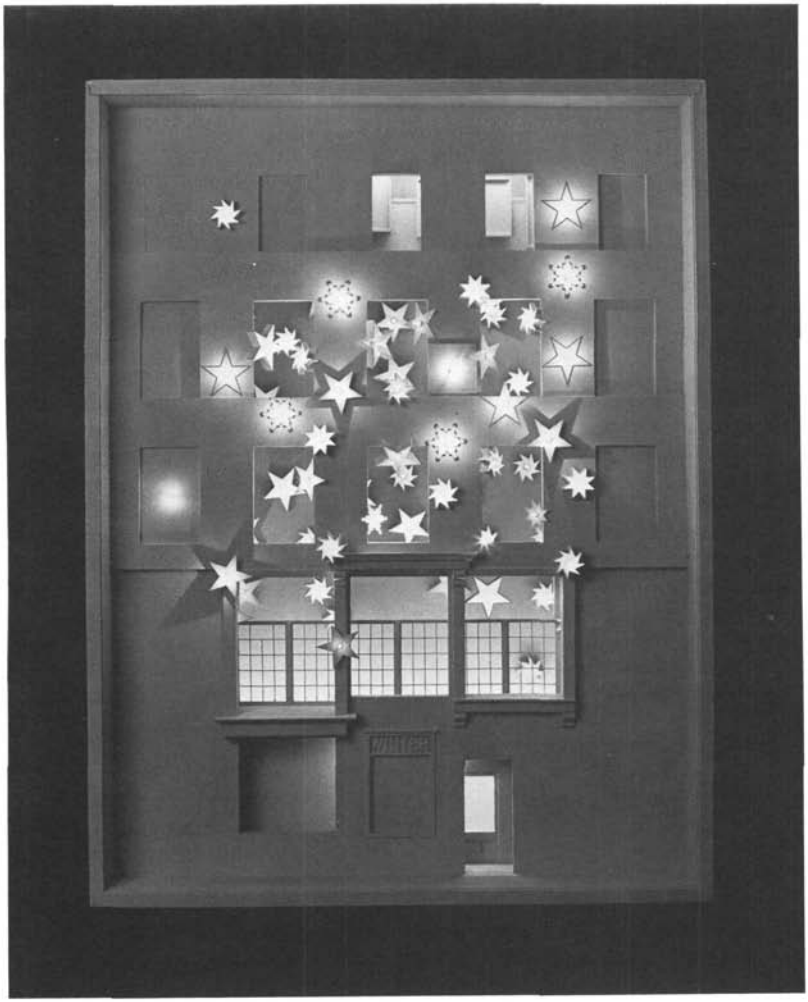

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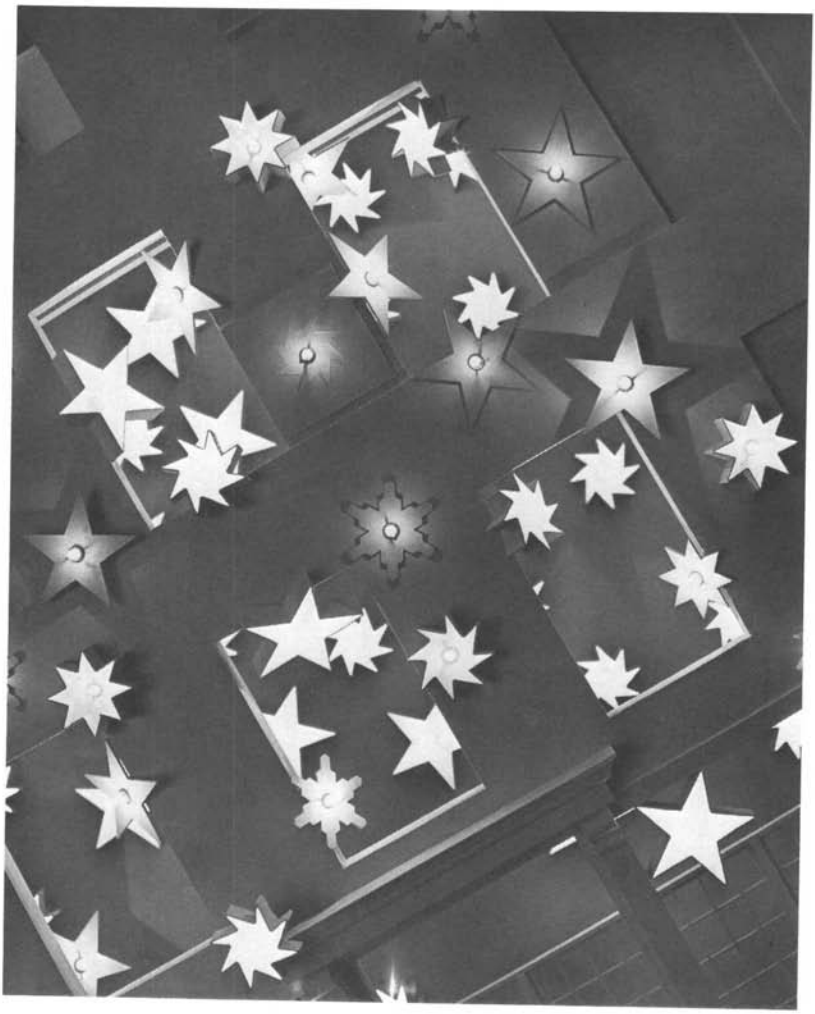

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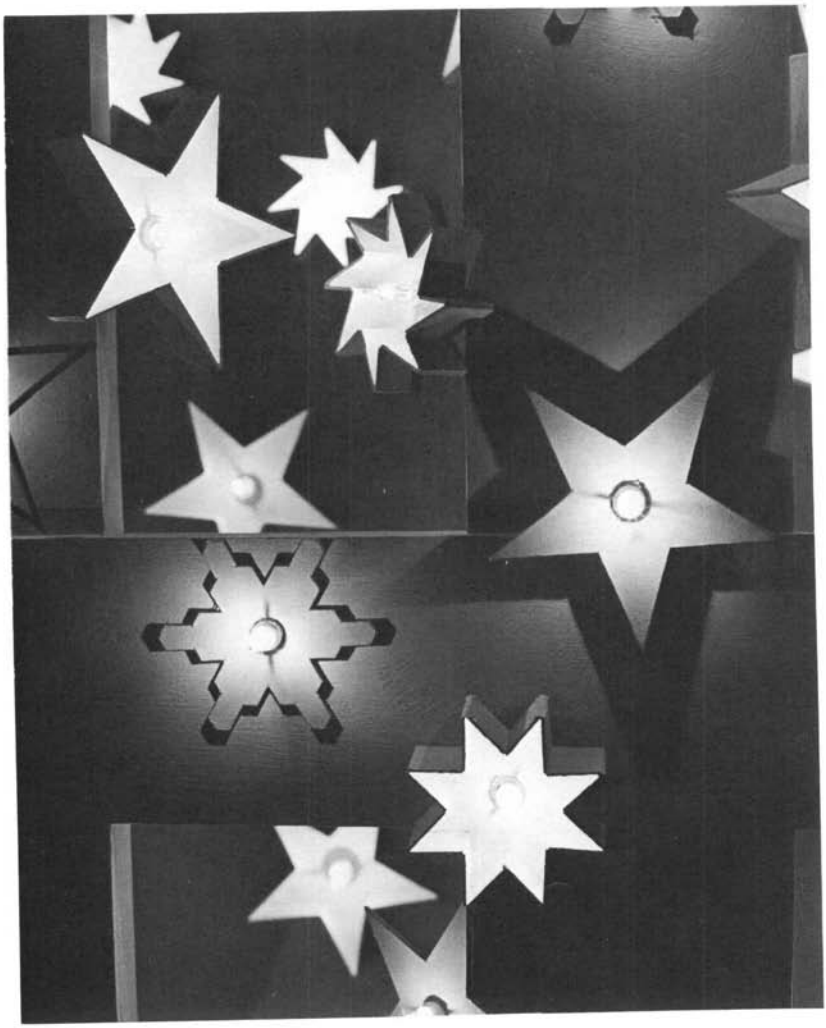

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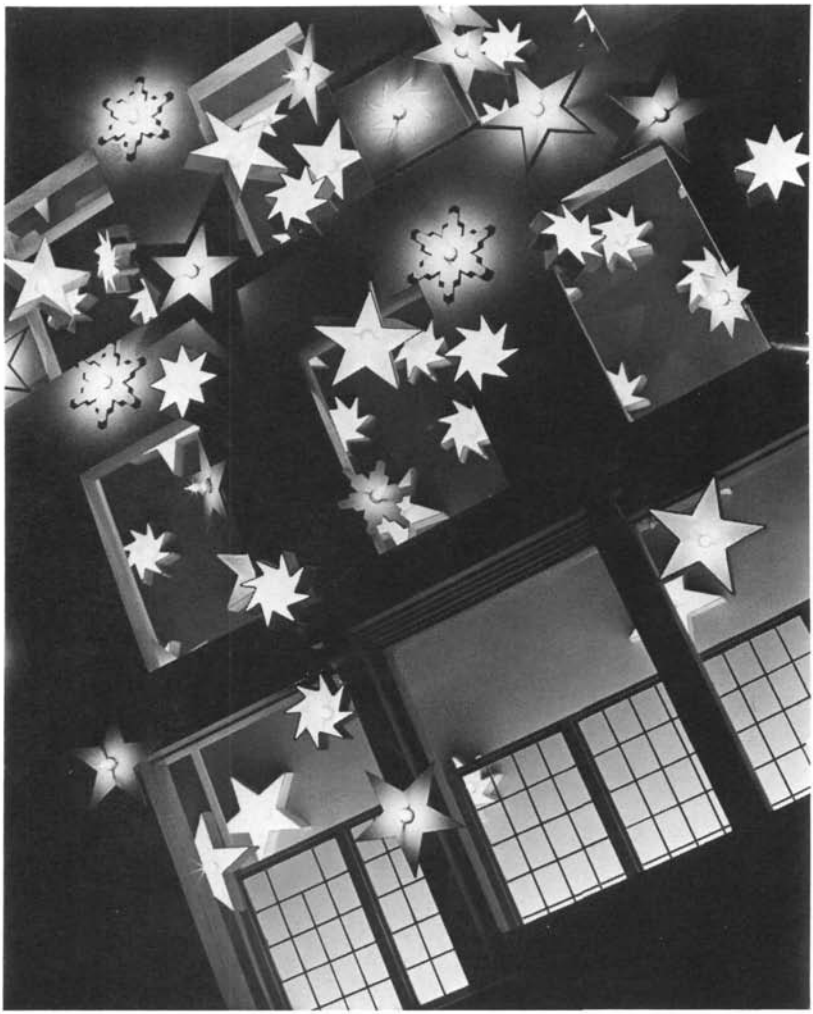

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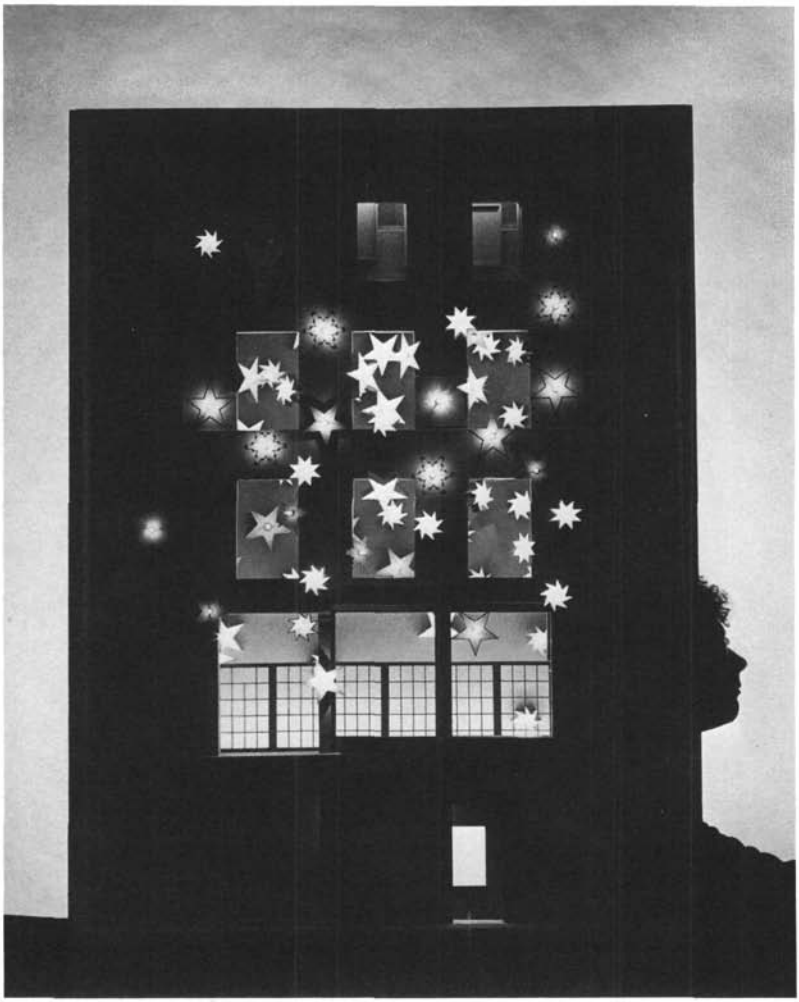

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Two *Amusettes*

Ray Russell

Evil Star

Dear Mr. Bernstein:

At the request of your publisher and our client, my colleagues and I have now read and discussed the typescript of your book. We are pleased to report that, with the exception of some isolated sections which we will specify, the book is not, in our opinion, actionable and should not expose you to litigation when published. It is a work of scholarly analysis, thoroughly documented, and even though much of it is pungently expressed, it lies well within the area of fair comment. You have obviously "done your homework," amassed considerable research, and consistently cited "chapter and verse," so to speak, in tracing the sources of Avery Bream's work. Your extensive parallel excerpts from his writings and the writings of others, from which you demonstrate his were derived, put you on firm legal, as well as literary, ground.

These parallels of style and subject matter are most impressive. Your own cleverness is rivalled only by that of Mr. Bream himself. I refer to his technique of borrowing a plot from one

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writer and retelling it in the style of another, thus achieving an artful act of camouflage undetected until now. I was astonished to learn, for instance, that his most famous best-seller, *Evil Star*, is practically a carbon copy of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, done in the style (or, as you put it, "filtered through the prism") of James Branch Cabell. It was likewise illuminating to discover that his acclaimed *Midnight Mushrooms* is little more than *Othello* with the races switched, told in the manner of early Saroyan, and with no acknowledgement to Shakespeare (unless we count the title, a quotation from *The Tempest*); and that his *Pristine Christine* is none other than the Agatha Christie classic, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, as it might have been written by Burroughs (you should clarify as to whether you have reference to William or to Edgar Rice) and with the Christine of the title (a play on Christie?) taking the place of the original victim. We suggest a title change, however, for Chapter III, in which the bulk of these and other parallels are cited. Even though *The Thieving Magpie* is the title of a famous opera, words like "thief" should be avoided.

On p. 97, after you quote Bream's statement, "I am the equal, in my fashion, of Tolstoy, Proust and Joyce" (from an interview in *Newsweek*), you make your point elegantly when you say: "The painter Ingres told those who likened him to Raphael, 'I am very small, just *so high*, next to him.' The composer Rossini made a pilgrimage to kneel before the manuscript score of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, declaring it a sacred relic." Why not leave it at that? To add, as you do, that Bream is "a conceited pig" not fit to "empty the bedpans" of Tolstoy, et al., is painting the lily, as well as flirting with litigation.

A similar example of gilding refined gold occurs on p. 118, following your sentence, "For over a decade, he has been promising to astound us with a vast confessional tome of Rousseau-like candor in which he will beat his breast and cry *mea culpa* to a host of sins, literary and otherwise; but the years come and go, and the guilt-heavy volume never appears."

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That is fine, but the short burst that follows ("What's the matter, Bream—*chicken?*") is, from the legal point of view, touchy.

Our Mr. Vieck asks me to say that, speaking now not as attorneys but as impartial readers, we hope we may be forgiven for commenting on the language you employ in Chapter VIII to describe the first Mrs. Bream. It seems inordinately biased in her favor. This is not, I reiterate, a legal point, but for you to call her "an angel whose delicate foot scarce touched the sordid earth when she walked" (p. 130), "too good by far, too radiant for this world" (p. 131), "an anthology of all the virtues" (p. 132), "a fount of undemanding, uncomplaining love" (p. 133), "a golden spirit the like of which no mortal eye will ever see again" (p. 134), etc., strikes us as somewhat excessive. When such phrases are read alongside your less than complimentary remarks about her husband, the contrast tends to cast doubt upon your academic detachment.

In Chapter IX, *Champion of the Overdog*, you walk a tightrope in showing Bream as being a far cry from the fearless anti-Establishment crusader and spokesman for writers' rights he pretends to be. The change or deletion of a few passages should make the chapter safe from litigation. Second paragraph, p. 155, the word "coward" is ill-advised, as is the phrase in the next paragraph, "soul of a weasel." Pp. 157-158 make vivid reading, but in them you are guilty of that with which you charge Bream: lack of substantiation. "His oft-repeated claim to have broken the writing arm of a magazine editor who had 'emasculated' his prose," you say, "is less piquant than it might be if he would, just once, name the offending butcher." Good point, but you spoil it (and skate on thin legal ice) when you add: "In fact, that editor has privately recounted the truth about the famous fray. Bream, it seems, had offered a timorous, whining protest to the emendations, thus provoking the overworked editor to gruffly respond, 'Damn it, I sweated blood to make that unreadable swill fit for human consumption. And this is the thanks I get?

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You're lucky I publish your shit at *all!* On the stressed word, the angered editor brought his fist down forcibly on his desk, breaking the little finger of his right hand." *You* do not name the editor, either, you see, so the authenticity of both versions is suspect.

The same chapter (p. 159) contains a passage that could be considered defamatory not only to Bream but also to Siegfried Rheinfahrt, the book publisher. I refer to the quoted letter, from and to unidentified sources, which describes an incident at a booksellers' convention: "You should have seen our dearly beloved Aviary buttering up that Nazi goniff, Rheinfahrt. I mean, it's one thing for Aviary to change his name and try to pass for goy, and it's another for him to fawn upon and flatter that lizard who's not only a crook but an anti-Semite. Most of us snubbed Siggie cold, but not ol' Aviary. Oh, no. It was nauseating. He did everything but kiss the s.o.b.'s ass, and maybe in the *privvissy*, as he'd say in that phony accent he's begun to affect, of his hotel suite, he even did that." The passage should be excised.

Are you sure of your facts (p. 201) when you describe Bream "running from bookstore to bookstore, spending his entire advance check buying up copies of his novel to get it on the [bestseller] list . . . "? What proof of this could you provide, if challenged? On the same page, how can you possibly know that he "not only wined and dined" but also "tickled more than the fancy" of the "aging female critic" who, according to you, "bears a startling resemblance to Samuel Johnson"? Moreover, if we understand what you are suggesting in the "tickled" line, does this not contradict the allegation in your p. 492 footnote (see below)? Please think about these points carefully.

I'm afraid we cannot recommend the retention of your allusions to Bream's income in the form they are now presented (p. 299). Nor do we quite understand the precise nature of your charges. Do you mean to imply that he failed to declare a substantial portion of his earnings for that year? That is a serious allegation. Or do you merely mean that he

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lied to the press, inflating the true figures in order to appear more affluent and successful than he actually was? Do you really plan to reproduce photocopies of his IRS returns? (I refer to such phrases as "See Plate 1," "See Plate 2," and so on.) How were these documents obtained?

Your comments about his mother (p. 307) present no legal problem because she is deceased, although in some quarters these passages may be criticized on grounds of taste.

The telephone conversation between Bream and his psychoanalyst (pp. 349-350) poses a quadruple problem, however. First: it could only have been obtained by wiretap, which is illegal. Second: it puts both patient and doctor in a most unfavorable light. Third: as our forensic medicine expert, Dr. Kenney, reminds us, you are not a licensed psychiatrist, so you are not legally qualified to diagnose Bream's mental condition as displaying evidence of "self-destructive tendencies . . . irreversible paranoia . . . dangerously sociopathic hostilities . . . desire for humiliation and punishment . . . schizoid hallucinations and delusions," etc. Fourth: as you point out by the long parallel quotations in the right-hand columns of these pages, the phone conversation is identical, word for word, to the conversation between the fictitious characters Dr. Proctor and Bernie Amber in Bream's novel, *Negative Feedback*. You claim (but without adequate support) that the real-life conversation took place five months *after* the publication of the book, indicating that "Bream is perhaps the only novelist in history whose own life plagiarized his work. So cowed and mesmerized was his puppet doctor by the fame of the celebrated patient that he responded on cue, Charley McCarthy-like, to Bream's leading questions and insults." Is it not possible, we submit, that you are mistaken about the date of the conversation? Might it not have occurred *prior* to the writing of the book, and been used as grist for the author's mill (a not uncommon practice among fiction writers)? Indeed, is it not an open secret in literary circles that Amber is the most transparently autobiographical character in the entire Bream *oeuvre*? Is not AMBER—as our

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crossword fanatic, Mr. Fenwick, says—a simple anagram for BREAM? For these several reasons, we counsel you to forego this conversation.

Similarly troublesome is the first of the two footnotes on p. 492 (beginning "Freud, Jung and even Reich all agree . . . "). While it may be perfectly true that certain aspects of his lifestyle are indicators of "impotence or other sexual dysfunction" rather than the "prowess he publicly professes," there is no way you can satisfactorily prove this, even by quoting the anonymous "Ms. X." Besides, here you are venturing into personal attack rather than professional criticism. We realize that you consider this an important insight into the "pathological sex episodes" of his work, which is the theme of this chapter, but we urge you to delete this footnote, as well as the parenthetical reference (in the body of the following page, 493) to what you call his "underendowment." The supportive Polaroid photograph which you indicate will appear on the "facing page" of the published book certainly must not be used. It is irrelevant that you obtained "the standard release form" signed by the photographer, his second ex-wife. What is required is a release from the subject, or model, Mr. Bream himself, and that, in our opinion, will be obtained only with the greatest difficulty. And surely the reference (same page) to his "*vain attempts at* solitary vice" (italics mine) is pure conjecture on your part?

(Before I forget it, allow me to backtrack and cover a couple of small spots I missed. In Chapter VIII, where you picture Bream's miscegenational first marriage, is it necessary to say "murderously jealous rages" and "where the body is buried," even though these expressions have a clearly metaphorical intent? They would not, perhaps, be problems were it not for the tragic sailing accident that took the life of the first Mrs. Bream, plus the fact that her body was never recovered. Some readers might interpret your figures of speech literally, as a monstrous accusation, and you would then be extremely vulnerable to the possibility of a lawsuit. Also inadvisable is the phrase, "Flowers die; rats live." You really must not call

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Bream a rat. And only this moment Mr. Fenwick calls my attention to the fact that the title of Bream's most famous novel is "rats live" in reverse—isn't that interesting?)

Now for the bad news. We must seriously question the wisdom of your lengthy (95 pages!) Appendix, in which you provide, verbatim and unexpurgated, letters written over the years by various editors, creditors, writers, literary agents, relatives, former fans and friends of Bream's, and so forth. The material, even if provably factual, is extremely damaging to Bream and was not originally intended by the letter writers for publication. In most cases, it seems unlikely that you have even secured proper permission. We strongly advise an appendectomy, that is to say removal of the entire Appendix.

Your revision of the above specified areas should protect you from litigation and, if I may say so, result in a most valuable work of contemporary scholarship which I, for one, found to be brisk reading. May I look forward to receiving a personally inscribed copy of the first edition?

Yours truly,
For
WEST, FENWICK, SCHLUSSELMANN, KENNEY & VIECK
Arthur Lowell West

P.S. Our Mr. Schlusselmann points out the amusing coincidence that your name is the German equivalent of a well-known Bream character. Are you aware of this?

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Srp

This year is the eleventh anniversary of the death of Srp. It would have been more decorous and pleasing to signalize the tenth, a round and even number, but last year everybody forgot. So we must make do, as best we can, with this lopsided eleven, which has a redeeming feature in that it was only in this eleventh year that a dazzling treasure, Srp's unfinished masterpiece, was discovered. The world of music, indeed of all art, all culture, is thereby enriched.

A thumbnail sketch, first, to put the newfound opus in perspective. Vladek Srp was born somewhere in Eastern or East Central Europe between the years 1909 and 1919. The country of his birth may or may not have been a part of what we now know as Czechoslovakia.* At the age of five, or fifteen, his family moved to Berlin (reason for move unclear),

*It is by no means certain that Vladek was in any way related to Stanislav Srp, the contemporary Czech violinist and member of The Dvorák Quartet (see their recording of Dvorák's String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 97, Crossroads Stereo 22 16 0082).

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where Vladek helped support his destitute parents and younger sister by playing the piano in cafés. This actually brought in less money than the home-preserved jams and other delicacies prepared and sold by his mother and sister, so young Vladek, like a modern Mozart, began composing songs, sonatas, symphonies and other works by the long ton. These works, having all been burned during a Nazi purge, no longer exist in any form, so we have only the accounts of newspaper critics of the period to rely upon. This was the period of his sprightly first symphony (known as Symphony # 3); the so-called "Snowflake" sonata for piano; the oratorio, *Arphaxad*; the exasperatingly difficult French horn concerto; the even more difficult, albeit pellucid, double concerto for alto saxophone and viola; the *Rhapsody* for unaccompanied piccolo; the eerie *Elegy* for string choir (played entirely *ponticello* from beginning to end, a bloodcurdling effect); the satirical song cycle without words, *Satirical Song Cycle Without Words;* and the lambent woodwind trio (Op. 45) which in later years, for what reason no one has ever been able to divine, he perversely insisted was a string quartet. Also the androgynophile *Chaconne à Son Goût.*

The rise of the National Socialist Party forced the Srps to move again, despite Vladek's eager offer to compose an opera called *Hitler*, to a libretto by Joseph Goebbels. Though not a Jew, he had made the mistake of drawing upon the Old Testament for his oratorio, and even when he pointed out that (a) so did Handel, (b) all the best stories are in the Old Testament, (c) he, Vladek, was uncircumcised, and (d) Arphaxad was a pre-Abrahamite who, according to Luke if not Matthew, was numbered among the generations of Jesus, he failed to melt both the ice of official disapproval and the Star of David that hung figuratively over his head, a six-pointed sword of Damocles.

According to another report, the Srp family's trouble with the German authorities had nothing to do with the oratorio, but with the home preserves of Vladek's mother and sister. Several members of the Party had fallen ill after sampling these comestibles, and the Srps were suspected of intentional-

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ly poisoning the architects of the Third Reich.

At any rate, the Srps split up. His parents hightailed it to France (only to meet a Samarra-like destiny later, when the Germans occupied Paris), his sister made it to Portugal with her infant twins (gift of an amiable Storm Trooper), and Vladek wound up on our shores. At one point, he changed his name to Val Syrup and eked out a living as a crooner of appropriately cloying ballads in the early days of radio. Those of us who are old enough may still harbor fading memories of that pinched, nasal counter-tenor, bravely bawling,

Van veep or veal skull,
Enteef ninkee sny,
I horry tomb I,
Bluh,
Half fan . . .

In his spare time, he was beginning to compose the monumental five-hour fugue for two orchestras, chorus and soloists, that would drain his health and ruin his eyes. Because of the rigorous demands of stamina and concentration required of performers and listeners, those few people who have had the strength to play or hear the entire fugue enjoy a kinship and a distinction similar to that of the hardy handful who have read all six books of Spenser's *Faerie Queene.* The fugue, like all the rest of Srp's work, has never been published or recorded.

It can be stated almost definitely that there is little, if any, truth to the story that Srp, during this same period (or, indeed, during any period) wrote and sold allegedly original liturgical organ music to a New York Lutheran pastor, under the pseudonym, "John S. Brook." The name, of course, is a literal translation of what would, in German, be Johann S. Bach, and the "original" music in question turned out to be nothing more than certain pieces of Bach's, copied down note for note, but backward, as in a mirror image.

There is a rumor—and it is no more than that—to the

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effect that, in the early Forties, Srp sought employment in Hollywood as a composer of film scores. According to one story, he was put under contract by Warner Brothers to write swashbuckling backgrounds for Errol Flynn; another version has it that the studio was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and the actor in need of symphonic support was Clark Gable. All the legends agree that Srp, no doubt inspired by the famous *tutti* crescendo on B-natural in Berg's *Wozzeck*, handed in a score that was simply one ninety-minute-long B-flat for full orchestra, from *pppppppppppp* to *fffffffffffff*, whereupon Jack L. Warner (or Louis B. Mayer) declared him a phony and gave him the sack. It would be fascinating to study this unusual score, but it has been lost, if it ever existed.

Also lost, until just this year, was his only opera, *Julius Caesar*, mentioned in letters to various creditors, to whom he made assurances that it would reap enormous revenue and allow him to pay every penny of his debts.

Prior to this work, no subject had tempted Srp to enter the operatic arena (unless we include the aforementioned Goebbels piece). But, soon after fleeing Europe and settling here, he became extremely fond of Shakespeare. The vivid characters and pulsing pentameter fired his mind with ideas. He itched to set the plays to music. However, *Hamlet* had already been done by Ambroise Thomas; *Macbeth, Othello* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* had been set by Bloch, Rossini, Nicolai, Verdi, Verdi, and Verdi; *Romeo and Juliet* boasted the operatic attentions of Gounod, Bellini, Pizzetti, as well as such lesser lights as Steibelt, Vaccaj, and D'Ivry, to say nothing of the symphonic delineations of Tchaikovsky and Berlioz, Prokofiev's ballet, et al. Even *Measure for Measure* had enjoyed, if that is the word, operatic treatment by Wagner, under the title *Das Liebesverbot.* But *Julius Caesar* was still fair game. Handel's baroque setting was, well, baroque, and it wasn't based on Shakespeare, anyway. So Srp set about conquering *Caesar.*

His plan was never formalized, but as best as it can be pieced together from letters, his intensions were boldly exper-

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imental. Each major character would be sung by *two* singers, the second to voice unspoken thoughts, and sometimes both would sing simultaneously, in adjacent keys. There would be no orchestral accompaniment to any of the vocal passages, whether aria or recitative, solo, duet, ensemble, or choral—they would be performed with harpsichord only, if that. There would, however, be plenty for the orchestra to do: a complex overture, massive preludes to each act, and numerous interscenic passacaglias, chaconnes, and glittering tone poems, not to mention pyrotechnical toccatas for harpsichord. Reversing the baroque fashion of having all roles, male or female, sung by women (or *castrati*), Srp preferred to be truly Shakespearean and revive the Elizabethan stage convention of the all-male cast. Calpurnia would be written for the bass-baritone voice, and Portia for a *tenore di grazia* (in some letters, Srp inverted this). Apparently, despite his imperfect command of English, he intended to construct the libretto himself, from Shakespeare, and in a letter to one of his many creditors he said he had cut the opening thirty-five lines of dialog that take place among Flavius, Marullus, the Carpenter, and the Cobbler, and would replace them with a ballet and choral canon on the repeated word, "Rejoice," this to be suddenly interrupted by Marullus' magnificent speech beginning "Wherefore rejoice?" His enthusiasm for this speech, he said, had moved him to skip ahead of the opening canon and begin his composing with the Marullus aria, and on the basis of this stunning number he fully expected to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship and probably a commission from the Metropolitan Opera Company, and so he would positively be able to pay up very soon.

Among his other plans for the work were a sonorous double octet for the eight conspirators; an extended *scena* for Antony and chorus, based on the funeral oration; spine chilling *ponticello* skitterings in the string basses alone for a pantomime scene between Brutus and the Ghost of Caesar (dialog deleted), probably reminiscent of, or borrowed from, his earlier *Elegy*. The battle music for the plains of Philippi

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would be in strict fugue form, Srp's model obviously being the battle fugue in Verdi's *Macbeth.* The final speech of Octavius would be jettisoned, and the opera would end with Antony's eulogy to the dead Brutus, concluding with the words, "This was a man!" The phrase would be taken up by Octavius, Messala, Lucilius, Strato, and the army, and developed into a full-scale motet. In one letter, Srp toyed with the notion of having the corpse of Brutus arise and join in, but this idea was probably abandoned because it would smack too much of self-praise.

Srp's most trusted friend during this period, it would appear, was a certain fortuitously-named Giulio di Roma, proprietor of a newsstand located somewhere in the dank caverns of the New York subway system. Earlier this year, he was knifed to death at his stand by hoodlums who robbed him of $13.76 and a carton of Almond Joys. Among his effects, most of which were utterly without value, was a large manila envelope with this sentence scrawled across it in pencil: "Giulio—please to hold this—they threaten confiscate—will pick up Thurs.—V.S." (Srp died on a Wednesday, of food poisoning, presumably from a jar of home preserves sent to him by his sister from Portugal. She and her twins were already dead, from the same cause, by the time the jar arrived in New York.) The manila envelope contained a spiral bound music notebook with the following carefully hand-printed in block letters on the cover:

"JULIUS CEASAR" [*sic*]
OPERA IN 5 ACTS
BY VLADEK SRP

There can be no denying that the music inside the notebook is fragmentary, but that is surely no reason to disparage its importance, as some have done. If paleontologists can reconstruct an entire dinosaur from a single bone, one is confident that a consummate musical craftsman (such as the estimable Deryck Cooke, who accomplished such miracles

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with Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony) will welcome the opportunity to build the complete opera from the full *ten* "bones" Srp has left us—

—particularly when we consider that, in addition to this pregnant measure, the musical paleontologist will have all of Srp's stated plans to guide him (see above). And, once this mighty task has been achieved, can the completion of Verdi's *Lear* or Debussy's *La Chute de la maison Usher* be far behind?

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A Private Person

You would think while the hours helped,
if the wind was right, then follow
a current along shore till a beach
offered. Sand, or whatever you thought,
held far-apart tracks. You landed, or your
story did, and found what was always
treasure, by choosing other than the trail,
a little aside, or turning earlier, or later.

Whatever you found, you replaced.
After the waves come back, no one
has walked: your story untells
itself. We let wings carry us
miles and miles back and forth
over the smooth sand. We love
your track of not leaving any,
the blank that says, "I was here."

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"Lady of Last Night . . ."

Lady of last night, no offense,
but when in the café I glimpsed you
seated with your husband, bored,
I thought you my own death.
From a corner I saw you suddenly:
I couldn't stop looking.
My death is a middleclass death,
pale-fleshed and cold of crotch.
She is a death proper and haughty.
She gets up when the maid does,
nothing escapes her care,
she tidies every corner of the house,
seeing if there is dust on the chairs.
She only goes out at night on some Saturdays,
and only drinks milk or a sip of coffee,
since coffee only keeps her so awake.
Lady of last night, you passed your glance
over the room and around the tables
casually, without lingering,
crossing your hands loosely low on your lap.
My death has your build.
My death is faithful like you.
My death is honest like that.
But then, there's nothing more faithful than death.
My death goes with me everywhere
exactly like you and your husband,
yielding only one debt, as you do,
exactly one conjugal debt.

(Translated from the Catalan of Vicent Andrés Estellés by Jaume P. Montaner, Vance Savage and William Stafford)

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The True Story of My Life

At the age of three
I was promised in marriage
to a neighboring princess
and took to heart
my father's interest.

As prescribed by her religion
I immediately underwent
strange rites of purification
submitting myself to an awkward diet
of eggs laid under a waxing moon.

I was apprenticed
to seven masters
who through a painful
pedagogical process
much in vogue those days

though later discredited,
instructed me in the arts
of etiquette, fencing,
ballroom dancing, history,
archery, rhetoric and erotics.

From Vienna she arrived,
my dancing teacher;
a woman who despite
her advanced age and weight
glided gracefully into my life.

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Beaming at me
from behind thick glasses
the Viennese was thorough
and ours was a tour
of what the world's feet
had been doing across the ages.

She was, however, prejudiced
against all modern movements:
the grotesque stomp of savages
so what I learned and polished
were the saraband, the minuette,
the gavotte, pavan and quadrille.

But most difficult,
demanding the greatest grace,
the courtship dance:
a complicated series of gestures,
a slow and erotic posturing,
and finally the chaste embrace
of bride and groom.

One master enchanted me.
He was a one-eyed gypsy
who ingratiated himself
into my father's household
by magically removing
the unseemly wart
that blemished my sister's
happiness, my father's
designs on another kingdom.

His lessons were to provide me
with what my father called
Personal Magnetism.
I was made to memorize
Twenty Grand Principles,
told to meditate forever

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on the cryptic remarks
with which he would leave me:
self-maintenance is the smallest
duty of the human species.

With another master
I spent long hours
untangling the snarled
lineage of the girl;
but the incestuous lines crossed so often,
their imagination for names was so limited,
that I grew confused, lost appetite
and though severely punished
gave up that line of study
satisfied that she was indeed
the issue of man and woman.

The princess herself
I never saw, though photographs
were sent daily from the palace:
a pale, frightened girl at first
and later, the sneering beauty
astride her stallion.

She would send me perfumed notes
recounting the exploits
of her favorite pet: *Today*
she would write of the alligator,
he snapped a hummingbird
clean out of the air.

My twentieth year
was entirely devoted
to the study of a groom's
manner on the wedding night.

Instructed in the secrets
of zippers, buttons, clasps and snaps

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my hands acquired the instinct
of searching always for flesh;

of unbuttoning, unzipping,
unclasping, unfastening,
bypassing at any rate,
cloth that stood in the way.

At the age of twenty-one
I sent the princess
three red roses and a note that read:
Je regrette;
I robbed my father's coffers
and eloped with the middle daughter
of the pastry cook.

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Gabby's Bathing Cap

(for my grandmother
as a young woman)

There is no sun
for it can not be remembered:
only a growing pressure
radiant around your head
which is packed in silence
as you swim from shore
to the middle of the pond

In the still September water
clouds dimly reflect
like faded scuff marks
on an old dance floor

Treading the fogbound water
you are a pin stuck all the
way into an old fur collar
Your head is bandaged in
bright cellophane its white-
ness clamps down gently onto
the dark algae-green surface

Your legs drop farther down
cutting through layers of cold
each one from a different year
Your feet kick at a darkness
that is too deep to know its
season like that strange air
found far back inside a closet
of your winter clothes suddenly
entered by your grandchildren
hiding one hot summer afternoon
so many years from now

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Out here the sky is growing dark
like a stone rolled back by a fisherman
looking for bait: the water fades
the color of mulled wine
Your reflection is all that is left
holding the pond up
a buoy
gradually carrying you back to shore

Once on land you pull off your cap
your long hair tumbles downward
a slow avalanche across your shoulders
Coming off your moist head it makes
a soft sucking sound of air rushing
through a hole in the forest floor
draining everything of color

You gaze out one last time over
the unlit water where unseen by you
every reflection
is already turning into yours

In Jackson's Study
(A Year After He Has Gone)

What correspondence there is
between his eyebrows:
looking at his fragile face
I feel that he could die
from just being seen

A blank white-paged book
lies open in front of him
on his desk like a large
moth resting briefly
with its wings spread down

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Carefully one of his hands
sweeps his hair back from
his face and for the first
time tonight I see his eyes
which shine with a quiet
violence an inner brilliance

About to write he sits there
staring steadily into my eyes
as if for some clue
to his next word an ending
to his very last letter
written so many months ago

His white suit saddens me
as if his body were dressed
in an overcoat of falling
water in a rapids whose
white water is pulling him
farther from me each second

He lights a new candle
The wick goes black
a bird's leg dipped in wax
Tiny hairs on his wrists
come alive under its light
with the golden sheen of
corn silk in late summer

He is absorbed in the
stillness of his chair
His feet tuck up under-
neath it in a soft cross
The room includes him
in a way that I can't

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He is remembering a place
he has never come back from
trying to learn of whatever
finally became of him
Hurrying across the paper
his pen makes the sound of
evening pushing through grass

Out his window
the lawn is quarantined
under a rash of stars
Someone is coming for him
up the long driveway:
headlights of their car
along an avenue of trees

each grey trunk startled
forward into the light
as if pushed from behind
like matches in a book
of matches being thumbed
forward one at a time

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Kentucky, 1833

It is Sunday, day of roughhousing. We are let out in the woods. The young boys wrestle and butt their heads together like sheep—a circle forms; claps and shouts fill the air. The women, brown and glossy, gather round the banjo player, or simply lie in the sun, legs and aprons folded. The weather's an odd monkey—any other day he's on our backs, his cotton eye everywhere; today the light sifts down like the finest cornmeal, coating our hands and arms with a dust. God's dust, old woman Acker says. She's the only one who could read to us from the Bible, before Massa forbade it. On Sundays, something hangs in the air, a hallelujah, a skitter of brass, but we can't call it by name and it disappears.

Then Massa and his gentlemen friends come to bet on the boys. They guffaw and shout, taking sides, red-faced on the edge of the boxing ring. There is more kicking, butting, and scuffling—the winner gets a dram of whiskey if he can drink it all in one swig without choking.

Jason is bucking and prancing about—Massa said his name reminded him of some sailor, a hero who crossed an ocean, looking for a golden cotton field. Jason thinks he's been born to great things—a suit with gold threads, vest and all. Now the winner is sprawled out under a tree and the sun, that weary tambourine, hesitates at the rim of the sky's green light. It's a crazy feeling that carries through the night; as if the sky were an omen we could not understand, the book that, if we could read, would change our lives.

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Allan Kaplan

Rehearsal of the Jazz Ballet in a Madrid Night Club

As Lorna falls across Freddy, and Bernadette,
who grew up in a rainy village of one factory
in upper New York, a schoolgirl toed and twisted
into a witty and bold motor called a ballerina,
lifts her leg comely—Sonia, red bandana
holding down her raven oceanic hair, once
on her toes in the Johannesburg Ballet Company,
floats with elegant arch. Sonia's fingers point down
like swans piercing the lake with hungry eyes.

Daryl, a jazz pro, highly so, high-di-ho, struts.
O camel lightly with sleek legs! Daryl halts
her camel walk to paw the floor
like a stallion undecided if to grab his filly
in high-pitched thunder
or to trot off simply
to sniff sweet loneliness rising up from the weeds.
She waits. Only her fingertips dance overhead.

Christina, formerly with the chorus
of the Stuttgart Opera Ballet, who left
her dentist betrothed, to study flamenco
and live in a Madrid *pensiõn,* solo,
now stomps the floor, *olé.* A muscle shoots down

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Christina's side. *Ip-DUP* a muscle drums her back.
Inside you, only, Oh Christina, the true flamenco throbs.
Its complicated rhythms elude this world of foreigners.

Amoral brass of the trumpets blare, *Arividerci Roma,*
as Jan of the eyebrows golden grabs
Penny's waist.
And up he raises her of the golden hair,
center parted. Penny,
it's you, Plato's little sister,
afloat on this air of perfumed song.

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The Dream She Interpreted As "Probably Having Something To Do With Sex"

We are both in Cambridge, getting ready to load all her possessions into a truck I have hired. I am very excited, because she is coming back to where I live & because this is the first time we have ever done physical work together. We stand on a gray, weather worn porch, looking at the backyard. Taking up almost the entire yard is a round, fiberglass swimming pool, the blue paint chipping, very rickety, but filled with water. The pump is not operating so the surface of the pool is covered with a crust of green scum. It is my job, she tells me, to take apart this swimming pool & get it into the truck. The rest of the moving she'll do by herself. She turns, swings the screen door wide, & disappears into the house. The screen door slams. Bewildered, I step into the yard & circle the pool. I push against the side, perhaps to test how difficult the task actually will be. The push sets the water rocking, gently at first, but soon it becomes choppy, great waves roll & break over the sides, foul smelling water sloshing onto the ground. My sneakers soak through, mired in the swampy patches of thin, stubbly grass. It is late afternoon, the sun a cold white disk in the overcast sky. I feel chilled. Inside the house I can hear the scraping of furniture over the floor, the soft slipping of cardboard flaps over one another, a clash of silverware dumped into a box, the tiny grunts of her effort.

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Writing With The Radio On

every song on the radio reminds me of you
each one seems to be the story of our lives
yet i believe nothing is like anything else
certainly we're more complex
than these playlist platitudes.

i spend all my time conjuring metaphors
from the ephemera passing through this room
the radio noise, the mail, the newspapers, the phone calls
hoping we will *be* something else
so if i tell you i am a utility infielder
if i claim you are postage due
remember, the details are artifice
but the theory still holds, rather
the feeling still holds.

i see from the newspaper some reviewer called "you"
"almost believable," & who do i address now
you, or "you," or a new 'you'
whose features haven't frozen in my mind
shifting with each new song, jelling during commercials
than melting when a new hit is played.

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i'm being sucked into the Billboard Top Forty
i can't deny i'm part of the 19-30
17 billion dollar marketing target group
i'm susceptible to the manufactured emotion
at the same time that i'm trying to hand craft one
for us to share, & the radio plays in your room too
where you are propped up in bed with your three primary
texts
Our Bodies Ourselves, The Joy of Sex, & Glamour Magazine
spread out before you on the quilt
you touch yourself as you ponder the pictures
did i ever tell you about my friend's 62 chevy
with the caddy transmission & the dodge engine?
he picked up all the parts in a junkyard
& the car got us to the drugstore
it got us down the shore
we got to the factory every day in it
& that was all we ever asked.

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Lake Time Lake Space

I never sit in a canoe but rest my bare knees
on the curved ribs of the bow
to feel the water slap and ease through canvas
like a huge lake trout that has breathed
against my flesh for days
for months for years and my paddle stroking in and out
and my regular breath are the only measure of time and space
as deep as the lily root.

I never dive from a canoe til my feet curl firm on the gunnels
and knees bend low
to shoot me into the warm parallax sun weaving through
the root stalks of the lily farm.
I dive to the mud to measure space low look up through lilies
to see sun high the light shaving through
and the dull yellow glow
of the shadow of buds. And time measures by to the eddy
of waves and slow strands of my hair as we tangle with stems
and refractions of sky.
Algae floats by for a calendar year my big toe digs down
to Orion's belt and the sun goes below
and the moon is near.

I never beach an empty canoe but swamp it to hold
some of the lake and I kick from the stern
to bring it in slow
and the water swells fore and the waves all break
as I climb to half ride on the slippery hull
the first water beast ever heading for land
and with me in its wake.

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Hubris

So you can balance well
I clear the path of ice
of ash of broken slate
I buy short skis
and live in a flat place.

So you can freely run
I saw off all the lower branches
of the crabapple
and make a metal grid
over the pond.

So the young prince
could be safe
Croesus ordered all the javelins
into the chambers of the women.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Sena Jeter Naslund *(The Animal Way To Love)* has published fiction in the *Iowa Review, New Orleans Review*, and elsewhere. She is now completing a novel and directing the writing program at the University of Louisville.

Charles Newman *(The Age Of Art)* has recently had his collection of three novellas, *There Must Be More To Love Than Death*, published by Swallow Press.

Ray Russell (*Two Amusettes*) has had two books published this year: a novel, *Incubus,* by Wm. Morrow & Co., and *Holy Horatio!*, a chapbook about Horatio Alger, by Capra Press. This is his third appearance in *The Paris Review.*

Ira Sadoff (*Seven Romances*) has had fiction published in *The Paris Review, Partisan Review*, and elsewhere. A collection of his poetry, *Settling Down,* came out from Houghton Mifflin last year.

POETRY

G.S. Sharat Chandra directs the writing program at Washington State University. He recently completed *Lord Shani's Crow,* a novel.

Rita Dove is currently a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared in *Antaeus, The American Poetry Anthology, Prairie Schooner,* and elsewhere.

Dean Faulwell has contributed poems to *The Paris Review* #63 and to many other publications. He currently teaches at Armstrong College in Berkeley, California.

Philip Graham has had work published in *City, Boxspring, Some, The Bellevue Press, Juice, Telephone,* and others.

Aileen Grumbach has published reviews and criticism as well as poetry, which has appeared in *Southern Poetry Review, The Nation,* and elsewhere. She teaches at Nassau Community College, SUNY.

Jeanne Hill teaches writing at Buffalo State College. Poems of hers have appeared in *The Nation, New Letters, American Poetry Review,* and in the anthology *Survivors of Invention*, published in 1974 by Latitudes Press.

Allan Kaplan is teaching English at the New York Institute of Technology. His book *Paper Airplane* was published by Harper & Row in 1972.

Frederic Matteson has had poems published in many magazines, including *Harper's Magazine, Partisan Review,* and *The New York Quarterly Review.* He is currently in the graduate writing program at San Francisco State.

Richard Pearse has had poems and fiction published in *Prairie Schooner, Fiction, The Iowa Review, The New York Quarterly Review,* and elsewhere. A broadside of poems, *Landscape of Skin and Single Rooms,* was put out by Monday Morning Press in 1972.

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David Ray is Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where he edits the quarterly *New Letters*. His most recent book of poems is *Gathering Firewood*, published by Wesleyan University Press.

David Romtvedt teaches African Literature and English at L'Université Nationale du Rwanda.

Michael Sheridan has published in *The American Poetry Review, New Letters, The Ohio Review, Rolling Stone*, and other journals.

William Stafford has taught for many years at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. His poems have appeared in numerous English and American magazines, and in four collections published by Harper & Row, of which the latest is *Someday, Maybe*.

Joel Stein has contributed poems to *The Paris Review, Icarus, The New York Quarterly Review*, and others. He is now painting and working on a book-length manuscript.

Ricardo da Silveira Lobo Sternberg is currently a Junior Fellow at Harvard. His poems have been published in *American Poetry Review, Ploughshares, Virginia Quarterly Review*, and others.

Richard Stull is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He will be spending some time this winter at Yaddo.

John Updike has published about twenty books, including eight novels and three collections of poetry. A fourth collection, *Tossing and Turning*, is scheduled for spring publication. His novel, *Marry Me*, was published this fall by Knopf.

F. Keith Wahle has published in *Abraxas, The Cincinnati Poetry Review, The Seneca Review*, and *The Paris Review*. He holds an M.F.A. in English from the University of Iowa.

Charles Webb is a professional singer, guitarist, and song-writer, and editor of the literary journal *Madrona*. His work has appeared before in *The Paris Review*.

Tom Weigel has contributed poems to several poetry magazines, among them *Arx, The Cathartic, The Record, West End*, and *Screen Door Review*.

Larry Zirlin is the author of *Sleep*, published by Wyrd Press. He co-edits *Some* and *Release Press*.

ART

Jonathan Becker is a photographer living in Hollywood, California.

Gilbert and **George** submitted the following as a Contributor's Note: Gilbert and George, Art For All, 12 Fournier Street, London E. 1.; 247-0161.

Cletus Johnson attended Bard College, The Pratt Institute and The School of Visual Arts. He has had one man shows at A.M. Sachs Gallery, the Newberger Museum in Purchase, New York and the Arts Club of Chicago.

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INTERVIEWS

Robert Phillips (Interview with William Goyen) is a writer and critic whose previous six books include his story collection, *The Land of Lost Content.* Next year Doubleday will publish a volume of his poems, *The Pregnant Man,* and New Directions is bringing out his edition of Delmore Schwartz's last poems, *Kilroy's Carnival.*

THE PARIS REVIEW is pleased to announce the Aga Khan Fiction Prize for 1976 has been awarded to Bart Midwood for his story *John O'Neill versus the Crown* which appeared in #66.

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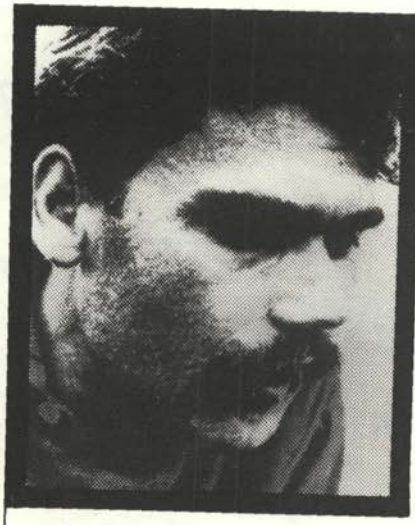

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